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HIRAM GREG

By
J. GROWTHER HIRST







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J. CROWTHER HIRST.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HIRAM GREG.

CHAPTER I.

A CAGED BIRD.

THREE months—three months of constraint and indignity, leavened by a sense of cruel injustice! Such was the prospect before Hiram; and while it remained a prospect it seemed as if this really short period would never come to an end. But though the days lagged sadly in their flight; though the bread he ate and the water he drank were embittered by galling reflections; though his jailors' voices were hateful because to him they were the voices of the instruments of oppression; though the life he lived was a

constant reminder that justice is blind and that he was the victim of her blindness—the days wore away, and what had been prospect slowly changed to retrospect.

Few men could have the opportunity for self-examination and for a review of the past, which three months of monotonous quiet in a prison gives, without finding much to regret and to repent of in the time that is gone by. When any change of circumstances enables us to get away from the agitations and distractions of active life, unless we are blinder than justice itself as represented by an intelligent jury, we see matters in truer lights and juster proportions than is possible while in the thick of the daily fight. We then perceive where we have made mistakes ; where we have done wrong ; where we have acted foolishly ; where we have lost a precious opportunity. Some writers hold that no event in which a man has been an agent, or of which he has been a witness, is

ever effaced from the tablets of memory. The record may be covered up by inscriptions of a later date or bolder character—as the priceless words of classic writers were covered by the senseless meanderings of the monks in the palimpsests of the dark ages ; but an impression once made remains for ever. It may need some peculiar combination of circumstances to make it start into visibility and legibility once more ; but when those circumstances arrive it springs into sight as fresh and vivid as when first received. And we are told by these writers that numerous instances might be adduced in which persons placed in a critical position—before consciousness is quite lost in drowning, for example—have seen the whole of their bygone life, down to its minutest detail, pass before their mental vision ; and that, therefore, each one's memory, with all its garnered items, is the dread Book of Record according to whose inscriptions he

will be judged at the last assize. If this theory be justified by the facts of the case, there are very few who need not dread the event which will restore the page which now in so many of its parts is blotted and obscure. There are some things in every life which he who has lived the life would fain forget and wipe out for ever from remembrance. Would you, gentle or ungentle reader, who are lightly scanning this page, feel perfectly easy if you knew that the whole of your past—its deeds, its thoughts, its selfish schemes, its sullied motives and intentions, its shameful failures and perhaps more shameful successes—were about to be revealed, not to the eye of the One who alone is holy, not to the eye of a cynical or uncharitable world, but to your own astonished sight? If so, it might be well to inquire whether you have grounds for considering yourself infinitely better than your neighbours, or whether you are not amusing yourself with the illusions of a fool's

paradise ? This, however, is a question with which we have nothing to do, and which you alone can decide.

The little halting-places which life affords, even if they do not bring us three months in a jail, do not empower us to see the past with the fulness and minuteness of detail which the speculation above referred to promises we shall attain in due course. Yet the imperfect survey which they enable us to take may be painful enough. But unless we are very silly, which many of us are, or very headstrong, to which some of us must plead guilty, the pain will not be unmixed with profit. It is true that the past cannot be recalled ; it is true that it is changeless and irrevocable ; it is true that time lost is lost eternally, and that opportunities neglected return no more for ever. But though the past is dead the future is only quickening into life ; and our review of what is now no more may help to guide us

in our use of that which is yet to be. " 'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours." Yes, if the talk does not end in vain regrets, but wakes the soul to a fuller self-knowledge, and arouses it to form nobler self-resolutions than those which have been the bases of its action in the years that are flown.

Hiram had no great wrongs or follies with which to reproach himself, and yet, being human, his reflections did not bring him perfect contentment. But they resulted in the formation of certain purposes which were not without their effect upon his subsequent career.

Among other things of perhaps greater essential importance he determined to be very diligent in correcting his mode of speech. He saw with sufficient clearness that beyond the narrow sphere in which he had hitherto moved his dialect would be a disadvantage; and as he meant to get on in the world, if he could do so by honest means,

it was well that he should shake himself free from his uncouth provincialisms.

But a man's method of speaking is not of so much real moment as that he have something worth hearing to say. A brainless fop may lisp his imbecile nothings correctly enough so far as grammar is concerned, and yet people don't care to listen to him, any more than they care to look at a daub just because it is hung in a pretty frame, or than they care to read weak twaddle because it appears in elegant typography. And how is one to become possessed of thoughts of any value if his mind is untrained and ill-informed? Considering these things, Hiram resolved to make good use of whatever leisure moments he should be able to command. As soon as his release came he knew that he must begin in earnest the struggle which would place himself and those dear to him out of the reach of want; but even in the busy life to which he looked forward

there would be fragments of time which might be turned to valuable account. At Heather Street he had bettered the poor instruction which he had received before he was sent to work in the mill. To geography, history, and a few of the masterpieces of English literature, he had already given some attention, and he determined to drink more deeply of the waters which he had already tasted. To these subjects, he would add that of political economy, so that he would be better able to look at the great questions affecting the relations of the various classes of society with adequate breadth and intelligence.

This certainly was not a very ambitious programme; but he saw the value of the subjects which we have indicated, and when a young man of his training and position has done that it is tolerably certain that he will go on further still.

He had quite made up his mind to quit

England, if he were convicted, and he never wavered in this design for a single moment. In some new land—which new land he left circumstances to decide when the time came—he hoped to find a fresher and wider field for his energies. He felt an invincible repugnance to returning to Millvale. Whatever his conscience might tell him as to his innocence, he felt himself disgraced by his imprisonment, and did not choose to face his old associates for the present. Then the expense of a visit, which could be of only short duration, was a consideration of some weight. He had said good-bye already to Helen and his mother, and it was useless to renew that pain. And besides these reasons he had the very strong desire to lose no time in commencing that new struggle with the world, which he had little doubt would end in the establishment of a home in which pinching and want would be unknown.

So the three months, which had seemed

so long in prospect, came to an end at last, the dreary prospect having changed to a gloomy memory to be kept out of sight as much as possible ; and on a bright frosty morning, early in 1843, he stood outside the prison gates, a free man once more. How glorious was the sunshine ! How pleasant the feeling that he was at liberty to go where he would—that he was no longer a slave !

His first impulse was to walk away, anywhere, so that he could get out of sight of the place wherein he had spent three wretched months of bondage. He longed, indeed, to put a wide distance between himself and this town, the very name of which was hateful in his ears. Possibly, however, he would find in the town itself the means of reaching the distant land which he had determined to seek, but whose locality he had not yet been able to fix. He therefore curbed his impatience to leave it behind.

Several letters had been handed to him as he quitted the prison, and after a few moments' hesitation he walked slowly on and read his letters as he walked. One was from Helen, rejoicing in the prospect of soon seeing him again, and regretting that she was not able to be on the spot and meet him ; another was a short, ill-written but warm-hearted epistle from Dawson Schofield ; the third was from Mr. Stapleton. After expressing his congratulations upon the conclusion of the trial of his fortitude and hopes for a brighter future, he wrote that he would certainly have been in Liverpool to meet Hiram had not unexpected and pressing business taken him to London. He hoped, however, to be in Millvale in the course of five or six days, and wished to see Hiram upon the first opportunity, having several matters of importance to communicate. He gave an address at which a letter would find him in the meantime if Hiram

thought it necessary to write, and intimated that a friend of his in Liverpool would supply Hiram with a sum of money for immediate expenses upon the presentation of a note which he enclosed.

Hiram had at first been bitterly disappointed to see no friendly face; but his letters showed him that he was not forgotten or neglected, and the thoughtful kindness of the minister touched him deeply.

But here was a most unfortunate combination of events which seemed to threaten the frustration of the purpose which he had formed. The first thing to do was to obtain the money which Mr. Stapleton had provided, and which he would need in any case. Then he could consider what his next step should be.

He easily found the office of Mr. Stapleton's friend, and handed his note to a clerk. While he waited in the outer office he noticed a number of advertisements of ships,

several of which were announced to sail for various Australian ports. His interest was roused at once. But they all sailed from London.

The clerk returned quickly and Hiram was shown into the private office. Here he received the money, and in addition a few cordial words from Mr. Stapleton's friend, who had evidently been made acquainted with his case. It was pleasant and refreshing to be spoken to in such a manner after the kind of address to which he had become used during the past three months ; and yet he could have wished that even this kindly-disposed and mild-spoken old gentleman had not known that he had just emerged from prison. So he made his acknowledgment as shortly as possible and walked rapidly away from the office up the busy street.

But those advertisements of the Australian ships had given him a new idea. He had thought of Australia, of Canada, and of the

United States, as the new land to which he might direct his steps. His leaning had been towards the United States, but he only preferred the one because he knew more of it than of the other ; and how to get to either he did not very clearly see. Indeed he had relied upon Mr. Stapleton's advice and assistance ; and now that he could not meet him for some time, he felt somewhat at a loss. He could not remain in Liverpool ; he would not go back to Millvale, and he must see Mr. Stapleton. Should he take the train for London, there seek out the minister, and, if it were found to be feasible, go to Australia ? Without much hesitation he determined upon this course ; and before midday he was seated in the train, whirling away to the great metropolis.

CHAPTER II.

AN OPENING PROSPECT.

It was already night when Hiram reached London, and he thought it best not to seek Mr. Stapleton until the following morning. He had heard much of the dangers which beset a stranger in the great city, but he felt full confidence in his own circumspection to keep him scathless amid such perils. He would act as if he knew the place, and thus give no hint to the human birds of prey that he was a country cousin. Accordingly, he walked quickly out of the railway station, and through several streets, looking about for some place which seemed to promise an eligible lodging.

It was, however, too early as yet to think of retiring for the night, and as no one part had more attraction for him than another he walked on without any definite aim. Gradually the fascination of the London streets began to lay hold upon him. Many of the shops were closed or closing; but still the crowd seemed greater, and the people more intent upon their several objects than he remembered to have seen in the busiest streets of Millvale upon the busiest days of the week. What a mighty stream of life was flowing by, or rather what a mighty sea was rolling and breaking on every side. Pavements crowded with pedestrians, roadways thronged with vehicles of every description, from the carriage with its high-stepping horses down to the barrow of the costermonger vending small slabs of fried fish; these appeared wherever he went. From the flaring windows of gin palaces the light fell upon the faces of groups whose

appearance told a tale of degradation and misery worse than any which he had known among the operatives of Lancashire ; and as he passed, and the doors swung to and fro as customers went in and out, he caught sight of bloated men and draggled women, and heard snatches of wild songs mixed with loud laughter, disputings, and blasphemy, while a gust of faint, warm air, laden with the odour of a hundred drams, seemed to strike him in the face. Then his attention would be attracted by a man vending rings and other small trinkets, all warranted "cold," as the man averred, while he blew the ends of his fingers ; or by a ragged crossing sweeper, or by a "happy family," in which the poor creatures huddled together in most unnatural proximity by way of counteracting the effects of the bitter January air.

At length he found himself in Holborn, and became aware that he was very hungry.

Seeing a low-windowed shop with joints of cold meat and other comestibles displayed as an advertisement of the good fare to be obtained within, and having satisfied himself, by the perusal of a card hanging in the window, that the prices were sufficiently moderate, he entered with a keen appetite for supper.

The interior of the place indicated that a tolerably brisk business was being done. A row of boxes ran down each side of a long apartment, and every box was more or less fully occupied. Hiram selected one in which two men were seated talking and laughing; and having ordered a plate of cold meat and a glass of ale, took stock of his neighbours while the waiter was gone to fetch these articles.

One was a tall man of wiry build, with long brown curling hair, a sunburnt face, and a patch over the left eye. The other was of about the same figure as Hiram,

but broader across the shoulders, and with a pair of lively black eyes, set in a countenance that looked as if it were made of wrinkled parchment. Both were dressed in suits of heavy blue cloth, with bright buttons and short jackets.

“Not bad grub this,” said he of the patch, as he raised a morsel of juicy beef to his mouth. “Here, steward—waiter! fill that again and look handy,” and he passed the pewter which he had just drained.

“Better than salt pork and hard tack, eh, Bill?” returned the man with the parchment countenance.

“Rather, Joey,” said Bill.

“I never wanted a good feed so bad as last voyage,” said Joey. “We had nasty weather a’most all the way home, an’ it took us sixty-five days from Adelaide to the Cape. But ‘more days more dollars,’ said we; an’ the skipper, he kep’ up his

spirits by thinkin' what a spankin' run he'd make when he got into the south-east trades; an' a good run we did make till we got up to about twelve south, when the wind fell light. We had nothing but light airs and calms for four mortal weeks, and the old man whistled for the wind, and swore at everything an' everybody aboard nearly all the time. Well, when we came abreast of Madeira, we had been out a hundred and thirty days; all the old horse was gone, pork nearly so, flour, bread, peas, all cleared; nothing aboard but water for three or four days, a few bottles of grog, an' some rice. 'What'll we do?' says the cap'n. 'I don't like to run into Madeira for stores, an' it looks bad to go on with what we have.' So he called the hands aft, an' put it to 'em whether he should run into Madeira or keep on for home. They were as good a crew as ever stepped a plank, an' knew that the old man was

making a bad voyage both for himself an' the owners, so they voted to risk it, and on we came. Well, d'ye see, when we got into London river everything had gone but half a bottle of grog, which had been kep' for the pilot. Says the Custom-house officer, 'What stores have you, cap'n?' 'None,' says he. 'No bread?' says he. 'Not a biscuit,' says the old man. 'No flour?' says he. 'Not an ounce,' says the cap'n. 'What have you lived on?' says he. 'On a handful of rice apiece—that is, the officers an' me—for the last two days,' says the cap'n smilin' a sickly sort of smile. 'Good heavens! you must be hungry,' says he; and hungry we were, and no mistake," Joey added emphatically, "and glad to get ashore to some grub."

"Well, we must take the rough with the smooth," said the man with the patch. "It's to be hoped the new ship will be more lucky."

“More lucky!” exclaimed Joey. “The *True Briton* is a lucky ship enough, an’ I’m sorry to leave her, though I am going out first mate in the *Pride of the Ocean*, and was only second mate in her.”

“Then that sort of thing doesn’t happen often?” said Hiram, who had listened intently to Joey’s narrative.

“Not often, mate,” returned Joey, who had noticed, and been flattered by, Hiram’s attention.

“Did you say you came from Adelaide?” queried Hiram, encouraged by the friendly manner of the chief mate of the *Pride of the Ocean*.

Joey nodded.

“That’s in Australia, isn’t it?” Hiram asked.

“It was when I left it,” said Joey, laughing.

“Is the ship—the *True Briton*—in London now?”

"In the East India Dock, nearly loaded. She'll sail for Adelaide in four or five days."

"She's takin' passengers, ain't she, Joey?" asked the tall man.

"A dozen or so."

"Perhaps you are thinkin' of going out?" said Bill, turning to Hiram.

"I don't know much about the place," said Hiram.

"Fine place, but rather warm at times," said Joey. "They're growing lots of wheat and wool, and need nothing but more labour to grow three times the quantity. Why, wages are double what they are in England, an' meat's so cheap I was told a squatter would think nothing of giving a sheep away when it's shorn. And," he added, with an air, "there's lots of sport—kangaroo hunting, an' parrot shootin', an' so on. There's no humbugging old game laws as at home, an' a man can go out with his gun when he likes an' shoot what he likes."

"That is, if he can hit it," said Bill.

"Just so. And I'm fond of a bit of sport myself, when I'm ashore."

"But the difficulty is to get out there," said Hiram, looking wistfully from one to the other, in the hope of some hint which might lessen the difficulty.

"Not at all, if he's the money," said Bill.

"But if he hasn't?" said Hiram.

"Then he must stop at home till he saves it," said Bill.

"Or work his passage," remarked Joey.

"But he has to be a sailor to do that, hasn't he?" said Hiram.

"Not always," returned the friendly mate of the *Pride of the Ocean*. "Sometimes there's a berth for a landsman aboard a ship."

"Well, anyhow, we can't stop here yarn-ing all night," said the tall man. "I feel like seeing a bit more life before turning in."

What d'ye say ? Shall we weigh anchor, and steer for the halls of dazzling light, where fairies trip the light fantastic ? ”

“ Ay, ay, sir,” cried Joey.

And the two sailors, bidding Hiram good-night, left him to his reflections.

He remembered having seen the name of the *True Briton* on one of the advertising sheets in the office of Mr. Stapleton's Liverpool friend ; and now it had been brought before him again in an equally unexpected manner. Would it be possible for him to secure a passage in her ? The words of her late second mate gave him encouragement to hope. If other landsmen could accomplish such an end, why not he ? The account, imperfect and fragmentary as it was, which he had heard of the country for which she was about to sail, seemed to point to that land as the scene where his hopes could find their fulfilment and his purposes be worked out. At least, there was food in

abundance, wages for those who would work, and an absence of those restraints on the many for the sake of the few which rendered the lot of the English working-man so hard.

Revolving these things in his mind, he passed into the street again; and, under the direction of a policeman, sought out a cheap lodging, where he soon forgot all his schemes in the sound sleep which followed a day of fatigue.

CHAPTER III.

HIRAM MAKES AN ENGAGEMENT.

NEXT morning Hiram was up with the lark, if such be not too violent a figure to employ in reference to one who awoke in a dingy house, in a dingy London street, on a dark, cold winter's morning. At least he was up before the sweep, whose voice was more like that of a crow than a lark, had ceased to make night hideous with his cry, and before the purveyor of hot coffee at the street corner had got thoroughly established in the business of the day. It was a new and a very pleasant sensation to him to feel on awaking that he was free to follow his own devices and to go where he would. He did not, however, pause long to meditate on the

delights of liberty ; but sallied forth intent upon making the acquaintance of the *True Briton* with as little delay as might be.

Having patronized the caterer of early breakfasts to the extent of a cup of coffee and a round of bread and butter, he set out on his long walk to the docks ; and reached his destination before the sun had risen, and while the air was still grey and chill.

When he entered the dock gates he was surprised with the number of ships lying before him, and wondered how he should find the particular vessel which he sought. He soon noticed, however, that the name and destination of each was displayed on a board hanging at her bows, or on the pillar of the shed opposite where she lay ; and he preferred walking along the wharves until he discovered the *True Briton* to asking where she was berthed. As he threaded his way among the piles of bales, cases, casks, and other packages heaped beneath

the sheds, and passed from ship to ship, with men loading or discharging their various cargoes, it was a constant marvel to him how all these goods could be disposed of and how all the vessels could find employment. The world began to seem a larger place than it had hitherto appeared ; and the young man, brought up in an inland town, with no very extensive stock of information, and like all other untravelled persons, with a most inadequate conception of the busy scenes of the great world's life, found his ideas enlarged by every new sight which presented itself to his eyes.

He was not long in finding the *True Briton*. The wharf alongside which she was moored was strewn with the miscellaneous assemblage of cases, bales, and boxes, which go to make up a general cargo, and these were being hoisted on board by the aid of a crane fixed on the wharf. Standing upon the deck near the gangway was a tall,

loosely built, but powerful looking man, with light hair and whiskers, keen, bluish-grey eyes, a nose turned slightly to one side, a short jacket, and a peaked cap. In his hand he held a pencil and a memorandum book, and was evidently engaged in watching and counting the packages that came aboard. Hiram rightly conjectured that he was a person in authority, and, going up to him, asked if he were an officer.

"Yes," he answered, without looking round. "Tally!" And he made a mark in his memorandum-book.

"Can I have a word with you?" said Hiram.

"Yes, what is it?" replied Mr. Braidwood, chief mate of the *True Briton*, for such were the tall man's name and office.

"I want to get out to Australia, sir, and should be glad if you could give me anything to do in the ship—any work in return for the passage."

"Tally!" shouted the mate. "Humph!" he said, casting a quick look at Hiram. "You've never been aboard a ship before?"

"No, sir," said Hiram.

"Just stand aside a minute, and I'll speak to you directly."

Hiram obeyed, and in a few minutes Mr. Braidwood came up to him.

"Well," he said, "what can you do?"

"I know nothing about a ship," said Hiram, "but I am willing to do anything I can."

"We don't want any idle, skulking chaps aboard this ship, d'ye see," said the mate; "but perhaps we could make you useful if you're not afraid of work."

"I never were afraid o' work yet," said Hiram, in his resolute tone, and with the blood flushing his face.

"Where do you come from? You're not a Londoner?"

"No, sir. From the north—from Lancashire."

"What have you been doing all your life?"

"Working in a factory."

"And why have you left it?"

Hiram hesitated, but only for a moment.

"If you knew how hard th' work is, an' how poor th' pay, you wouldn't wonder at anybody leavin' 'em. But I had some trouble besides, which drove me away."

Mr. Braidwood looked Hiram in the face. He had already noticed that his hands bore traces of toil, and the fearless eye and honest face were not those of either an idler or a rogue. He felt sure that the trouble of which Hiram spoke was not disgrace, and refrained from any further question.

"Well," said the mate, after a moment's reflection, "we're in want of a second steward. Just go away aft and speak to the steward about it. Tell him the mate sent you. There he is, coming out of the cabin door."

The steward explained to Hiram what

would be required of him if he obtained the vacant situation, cross-examined him respecting his antecedents, and finally reported to Mr. Braidwood that he thought he would do. The result was that Hiram was directed to see the captain, who was expected on board in the course of the morning.

The reception he had met with led Hiram to hope that his application would be successful. While waiting he walked about the deck, watching everything that was being done, and noting all that was to be seen, with the interest which a landsman, to whom all connected with a ship is a mystery, is sure to feel, especially when the ship in question is likely to be his home for some months to come. Mingling with the pleasure which he felt in having so far met with no rebuff was the regret occasioned by the thought that he was apparently on the verge of leaving behind all that had hitherto made up the interest of his life. Before him were

experiences, perhaps hard, certainly strange and new. But these he could face, if only success might at last crown his efforts. To what would the step he was taking lead? He would get away from the scenes where he had witnessed so much suffering and injustice. In the new land to which his eyes were now turned the grinding poverty of the old country was unknown; the inequalities which placed a few in luxury and left the masses devoid of almost everything but a crust—in some cases even of that—did not exist. There the resolute mind and the steady hand were sure of a fitting reward; and fronting the man who laboured was a better prospect than years of pinching want with a workhouse or a pauper's grave to close the view. In England he had stood in the felon's dock, and been immured in the felon's cell, though innocent of any crime. He felt keenly the injustice that had been done him, and half imagined, in spite of his

better sense, that so long as he remained in England everybody could see marks of the jail upon him. But if he were leaving suffering and wrong behind, they were still there ; they were not destroyed ; and people less fortunate or less energetic than himself, millions of men, women, and children, would still have to bear the burden which he trusted to escape. He could not forget that at one time he had hoped to play his part in bringing about a happier state of things. Then there was Heather Street, with all its happy associations ; there was the genial heart and wise counsel of Mr. Stapleton ; there was Helen. And the picture of her patient, anxious face, with its tremulous, irresolute mouth, and the eyes which had so often looked to him with the helpless, reliant expression of a child, filled his mental vision, banished his contending thoughts, blotted out the ship, the busy workers, and all except itself. What would she do—what

change would come over her—during his absence? Ah, well! the day was worth looking forward to when he should fetch her across the sea to a home of his own.

He was roused from the reverie into which he had fallen by the appearance of a personage dressed in a dark-blue frock coat, and a tall hat, who, after speaking to the mate, walked into the cabin. Mr. Braidwood shortly afterwards followed, and in a few minutes the steward called to Hiram that the captain was ready to speak to him.

“You want to work your passage out, eh?” said the captain.

“Yes, sir.”

“What wages do you expect?”

“I didn’t expect any besides the passage, sir.”

“Well, you can go. We’ll enter you for a shilling a month. Mind and attend to your work. If you give satisfaction—and there’ll be plenty to do, mind—I may give

you a trifle when we reach Adelaide ; but that will depend altogether on yourself. Mr. Braidwood, the chief officer, will direct you to the shipping office, where you will sign the articles."

Hiram was quite as much astonished as pleased with the easy success which had attended him. After being shown by the steward the berth which he would occupy, and having received some hints as to the few articles which he would require for the voyage, he set out to walk back to the City. Mr. Stapleton's address was at an hotel in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's Churchyard, and this hotel he found, by dint of judicious inquiry, without much difficulty.

In answer to his questions he was told that Mr. Stapleton was in, and was at lunch. He sent in his name, and in a few moments the minister was out in the hall shaking him violently by the hand, much to the scandal and amazement of the porter, and

of a stout waiter, who appeared to be greatly burdened with a sense of his own importance.

"My dear Hiram! Where have you come from?" he exclaimed, while the hand-shaking was still in progress. "Have you dropped from the sky?"

"It would be truer to say I'd come in the other direction," returned Hiram.

• "You have emerged from the 'gloomy shades,' anyhow. But who would have expected to see you here? Why, I thought you would have been in Millvale before now. But, whatever wind has brought you, I am heartily glad to see you."

"I couldn't go back to Millvale. I couldn't face it yet."

"You are hungry, I dare say. Come in and have some lunch."

"Not here, sir. This is no place for me."

"Oh, nonsense! You are my guest for to-day. Come along!" and Mr. Stapleton,

seizing him by the arm, carried him into the coffee-room. Here the minister's unfinished lunch was spread upon a small table in a recess, and, calling for another knife and fork, he speedily helped Hiram to an abundant meal.

"I *am* hungry, certainly," said Hiram, plying his knife and fork. "I have had a long morning since breakfast."

"Then you have been in town some time? But there—we'll defer talking for the present, and you shall tell me all about your affairs afterwards."

"And now," said Mr. Stapleton, when they were seated in the reading-room, which at that time of day was almost deserted, "let me hear what has brought you here, and what are your plans for the future."

Hiram thereupon related how he had found himself placed in Liverpool, and the considerations which had led him to go to

London, dwelling especially upon his anxiety to see Mr. Stapleton, more particularly as he was informed in that gentleman's letter that he had a communication of some importance to impart.

"That," said the minister, "was a message from your good friends at Heather Street. As you know, they collected a small sum of money by weekly contributions. Part of this went to pay the solicitor for his advice in reference to your defence; but there was a balance in hand which I was entrusted to hand to you when I met you, as I intended to do in Liverpool. Though I could not do that I thought it might be convenient for you to have it soon after your return home."

"I'm not unthankful to them. They've been kinder to me—a hundred times kinder—than I deserve; and I shall never forget it. But I don't need the money now; and I couldn't bear to take anything from them

unless I were very hard pushed. God knows they've little enough to spare."

"But what do you mean by not needing it? Richard Whittington has not already become lord mayor, has he?"

"No, sir, not yet; but he's engaged as second steward on the *True Briton*."

"Second steward on the *True Briton*!" exclaimed Mr. Stapleton, in amazement.

Hiram explained how, by a chain of fortunate circumstances, he had obtained the position of which he spoke. "What," he added, "is your opinion of the move, sir?"

"You have acted upon the maxim, 'Decide for yourself, and then, if you choose, ask for advice,'" returned Mr. Stapleton, smiling. "However, as you had made up your mind to go abroad you could not have acted better as events have happened. Your passage is provided for; but what do you propose to do when you land?"

“Well, I cannot rightly say. I must see what there is to be done, and I shall take any honest work that first offers itself, and if I’m not content with it shall just stick to it until I see my way to something better.”

“That’s the true spirit of a colonist,” said Mr. Stapleton approvingly. “A man who goes out to a young country, determined to do only one thing, or unwilling to turn his hand to whatever employment may be readiest, unless he have both capital and practical knowledge, would be far wiser to stay at home. Such, at least, is the view which I have been led to form by all that I have heard and read on the subject. When does the ship sail?”

“Early on Tuesday morning. I am ordered to be on board on Monday night.”

“And this is Friday. Have you any plans for the interval?”

“None.”

“You will have to find lodgings. I think

I know a place that will serve your purpose. We will go and see it by-and-by. You will need something in the way of outfit. The money from Heather Street will be useful in providing that ? ”

“ No, sir, I cannot take it for anything.”

“ But it is there ready for you, and they would be deeply hurt if they knew you refused it when it might be of such service.”

“ I shall not refuse it, sir ; but I shall ask you to use it for my mother. She will have enough to do to make ends meet until I am able to send her something. She has the two childer to think of now as well as herself.”

“ That is very true,” assented Mr. Stapleton.

“ And,” continued Hiram, “ as I shall want very little for myself, I shall ask you if you’ll lend me a couple of pounds in addition to what is left of what I got from your friend in Liverpool. That, I think,

will buy me the few clothes I shall need ; and I hope to be able to return it before very long."

"I will do that willingly. But I don't like the idea of your landing in a strange country without anything in your pocket."

"I shall have my wages—a shilling a month!" said Hiram, lightly. "You see I'm entered as one of the crew, and the mate told me they couldn't put you on the articles without some wages. Besides, I have a half promise of something more if I behave myself, an' if I'm badly in want of money I shall have the remembrance of that to keep me straight. At the worst, I've a pair of hands."

"As you will," said Mr. Stapleton. "And now, as that point is settled, we must see about the lodgings."

"You'll see my mother when you get back to Millvale, and Helen, too, if you have a chance," said Hiram, "won't you, sir?"

"I certainly will do that."

"And tell 'em you've seen me; an' that I'm going out full of hope, determined to make a home for both of 'em better than they've ever known."

Mr. Stapleton nodded his head.

"Of course I shall write to them myself as soon as I can; but a letter isn't th' same as seeing someb'dy whose seen those you care about. There's a hymn book an' a tune book," continued Hiram, with a slight quaver in his voice, "which I left in th' singing seat at Heather Street. I should like 'em to be given to Helen to take care of; and, if it's not troubling you too much, I should like you to tell Dawson Schofield and Doctor Wood how thankful I am for all their kindness."

The lodgings of which Mr. Stapleton had spoken were found to be disengaged and suitable, and were accordingly taken.

Hiram was fully occupied for the re-

mainder of the day in writing letters and in purchasing the few articles of clothing and the other miscellaneous odds and ends needful for the voyage which his means enabled him to procure. The rest of the time at his disposal he spent, partly in company with Mr. Stapleton, partly according to the minister's directions, in viewing some of the wonderful sights which London affords ; and on the Sunday morning had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Stapleton preach in a certain dingy old chapel situate in a street leading out of the Strand, towards the river.

CHAPTER IV.

STORM AND CALM.

HIRAM went on board on the Monday evening, and the ship, lying dark and still in the dock, with the water lapping her sides, seemed dismal enough. There had been frost in the night, and next morning a thick white mist hung over dock and vessels, hiding the opposite bank of the river from view. The deck and rigging of the *True Briton* were covered with hoar frost, making the one slippery and the other cold and stiff. At an early hour everybody on board was roused, and everywhere busy preparations were in progress. Between eight and nine o'clock the tug was attached, and, ac-

accompanied by a great deal of running hither and thither, both on the deck and on the wharf, and no end of shouting and pulling of ropes and general confusion, the *True Briton* was got out into the river. At the pier, alongside which she drew for a short time, a few folks went ashore and a few more came aboard ; then the tug began to pant and groan ; and the sun, which had been waging a stiff struggle with the fog, shone through, and the frost upon deck and rigging glittered and sparkled in the light ; the sailors, fore and aft, cheered and cheered again ; the wives and sweethearts on the pier replied, the women weeping into their handkerchiefs until they were wet, and waving them until they were dry ; and gradually the pier and the watching groups seemed to recede into the fog, and were soon lost to sight.

At Gravesend the *True Briton* lay until Wednesday morning, having to ship the

remainder of her cargo ; and here most of her passengers came on board. Hiram was already too busily engaged to be able to note the views offered by the banks of the river, or, subsequently, by the cliffs of the Kentish coast, which were presented in rapid succession during the rest of the day. Night drew on ; lights gleamed from the shore ; and the pilot, leaving off Deal, took ashore a small package of letters from the ship's company and passengers, including a few hasty lines from Hiram to Helen and his mother ; and the wind being fair, the tug left during the night. Early on the Friday morning they saw the last of the English land and were fairly embarked on their long voyage.

The *True Briton* was a noble vessel of between 700 and 800 tons, well found, well manned, ably officered, and seaworthy in all respects. Her run down channel had been exceptionally good, and everybody on board,

except those passengers who were too sick to feel the slightest interest in anything, were full of congratulations on the good fortune which had so far attended them. The captain was in high good humour, and the steward told Hiram that only the last voyage they were three weeks in making the same distance, and that if they had equal luck throughout they would make a very smart passage. Hiram felt less interest in this information than he would have deemed possible at the outset. He was feeling the symptoms of that malady which is so distressing while it lasts, but which, for some inexplicable reason, usually excites more ridicule than pity. But, though his head was giddy, and the sight of food was most offensive, though every roll or lurch gave him a most disagreeable sensation, he would not complain. He saw that if he would win the respect of the people on a ship he must not give in or neglect his work

upon the plea of sickness, and so he held up with as good a grace as possible.

They had, however, only gone south as far as the Bay of Biscay, when the wind increased to half a gale from the north-west. It was then that the awkwardness of the ladies and of the landsmen began to afford some fun to those more accustomed to the pranks of old Neptune.

Among the passengers was a Miss Braceley—a prim, stiff, old maid, very precise in her dress, and with a very good opinion of herself. Character soon shows itself on board a ship, and the least observant of her fellow-voyagers had seen ere now that Miss Braceley firmly believed that whatever she said or thought was right, simply because she said or thought it. To herself her notions were the standard of universal expediency and absolute right. There could be no greater heresy in her eyes than to follow plans which differed from hers, or to

look at affairs from a point of view to which she was unaccustomed. She accompanied, or was accompanied by, her brother-in-law and his wife. Her brother-in-law was a good-natured Yorkshireman named Hutchinson, who seemed to have accommodated himself to a seafaring life as if he had been to the manner born. He was going out to establish himself in the wool trade in Adelaide, encouraged by his brother, who was already a prosperous sheep-farmer somewhere in the wilds of the young colony. Besides Miss Braceley, Mr. Hutchinson, and his wife, there were nine other passengers in the cabin, whom we need not linger to describe.

Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson and Miss Braceley were among the half-dozen passengers who were equal to appearing at the dinner-table on the day in question. Between wind and sea, the ship was heeling over and rolling to a considerable degree. Plates slid

about the table, tumblers justified their name ; and everybody acted as if they were having a children's game at see-saw against their will. It was only with the greatest difficulty that a plate could be balanced in one hand, while a spoon or fork was guided to the mouth with the other.

Hiram had just entered the cabin with a pile of plates, when the *True Briton* gave a great lurch, which was followed by a clatter on the table, a little scream from each of the ladies, and a groan from half a dozen unseen sufferers. Miss Braceley and Mrs. Hutchinson sat side by side on the weather side ; and Hiram could scarcely restrain a smile, as when the ship rolled backwards they rose simultaneously, leaning over the table to preserve their perpendicular, each holding a soup plate out at arm's length, keeping her eyes fixed upon it as if fascinated by its contents, and screaming—

“The soup, the soup !”

"No, thank you, Tilda," said Mr. Hutchinson, who was Miss Braceley's *vis-à-vis*.

"No, thank me, for what?" tartly demanded that lady, as an opposite roll allowed her to resume her seat.

Captain Parker laughed out loud—a proceeding which brought upon him a severe look from Miss Braceley.

"For the soup you were kind enough to offer me just now," replied her brother-in-law.

"I didn't offer you any soup, you stupid! It was the ship that nearly threw me over the table. I never saw such a ship as this," which was quite true, as she had never been at sea before. "Why can't you keep it straight, captain?"

The captain smiled slyly, and was about to reply, when Miss Braceley, still carefully balancing her plate, interrupted him.

"Now, Harriet, Harriet! You'll have that soup over you if you don't take care.

Hold your plate as I do, and accommodate yourself to the motion."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Mr. Hutchinson, and everybody at the table joined in chorus, while even Hiram and the steward were unable to repress a grin. While Miss Braceley was instructing her sister, her attention was, of course, withdrawn from her own affairs, and when the laugh recalled her to those affairs, she saw that a small cascade of the greasy fluid had descended into her own lap. She turned red, put down her plate hastily, and began to rub her dress with her napkin.

"It is very annoying," said Mrs. Hutchinson; pityingly.

"Annoying!" cried Miss Braceley, "I should think it was! But there is nothing but annoyance. Why, one cannot sleep quietly in one's—I mean," said Miss Braceley, who hesitated to speak of a bed before men, "that one is tossed about all day and

night, until one's bones are nothing but a mass of bruises."

"Yes, and even when one gets up," chimed in Mrs. Hutchinson, "one has the greatest difficulty to wash and dress."

"The soap slides off the wash-stand and under the bunk, as you call it," continued the spinster in an aggrieved tone; "and the water in the basin swills first to one side and then to the other, and finally half of it is thrown over one's feet."

"And when you try to stand before the glass," added Mrs. Hutchinson, "you cannot do it. You're kept rushing from one side of the cabin to the other, and if you weren't careful you'd get most horribly bruised."

"And one can't sit or walk or have a meal in peace," pursued Miss Braceley. "My dress is quite spoilt. Oh, there it goes again!"

"Here, steward, this won't do!" cried

the captain, who was fond of his joke, as he gave Mr. Hutchinson a comical glance.

"Where's that assistant of yours?"

"Here, sir," said Hiram, stepping forward.

"Just you go on deck, get a capstan bar, put it through the lee scupper, and see if you can't steady the ship."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Hiram, between his ignorance of all nautical matters, and the sickness which still made his head feel dazed and dulled his wits, failed for the moment to see the utter absurdity of the order.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Braceley to the captain.

"It will be so nice to have the ship steady," chorussed Mrs. Hutchinson. "Ugh!" she cried as her tumbler toppled over, and its contents flooded the table.

Hiram returned at the moment, and was greeted with a hearty laugh. He smiled, and remarked to the captain—

“Taken in this time, sir.”

The ladies could not understand where the laugh came in. Miss Braceley afterwards confided to her sister her belief that it was some horrid joke, not fit for ladies' ears; and she, for her part, hoped they would always keep such witticisms to themselves. *She* didn't want to be shocked by any coarseness, either from sailors or any other unmannerly people.

“Well, well,” said the captain, “you'll soon be out of this; and then you'll begin to enjoy the voyage.”

Then he left the table and went on deck, whither he was followed by one or two of the more hardy of the passengers, who enjoyed watching the wild, grey water rolling and breaking; and fighting with the wind, which seemed to aim at carrying them off their feet.

But the captain's words were verified before long. Better weather came. The

invalids regained tone, and at every meal seemed bent upon making up for lost time. Hiram lost all trace of sickness ; and began to rejoice in the softer and milder air and the steadier sailing which they had after catching the north-east trades. Every day the air grew warmer until they entered the tropics ; and then the difficulty was to escape the blazing sun, and even at night to keep cool enough to sleep.

Oh, the glorious tropical nights at sea ! The ship, with every stitch of canvas set, moving so easily through the water that one could easily believe her to be stationary ; the sailors lying about on the hatch near the forecastle, or singing familiar songs and choruses, or playing upon improvised instruments old familiar airs ; the moon shining with clear, soft splendour, striking pathways of pale light across the waves, and falling like a white, transforming glory upon the outspread sails ; such were the elements of a scene of perfect peace.

On one such night Hiram was standing on a spar watching the sea over the bulwarks near the main rigging. And as he watched, a cloud floated up and hid the moon ; but he could see the white light falling from behind the cloud upon the distant waves. And then he noticed what before he had not seen—another ship, perhaps ten miles away, homeward bound ; and she sailed on, white and ghost-like, into the light—sailed out of darkness into the midst of the silvery beams—then again into the darkness, and he saw her no more. He was thinking of Helen and of home ; and the distant ship seemed to be a symbol of his life. Would the darkness of separation and exile pass away ?

Or, again, when there was no moon, the heavens would be of an intense blue and the sky studded with stars of almost dazzling brilliance. And on several such nights the phosphorescent appearance of the water was something wonderful. In the wake of the

vessel, where the disturbance caused by her passage still continued, there was to be seen a long, broad, moving streak of silvery light. Immediately under the stern, where the waters circled and bubbled and broke, amidst the white, hissing ferment, gleams of light, nearly as strong as if shed from a small lantern, could be seen flashing every moment, and as the water gurgled and glistened, it looked like a trembling mass of frosted silver beneath a strong and pure, but unsteady light. Where the agitation gradually ceased, the dark blue water seemed to be studded with stars clearer and more lustrous than those in the sky above, or rather, the stars flashed and twinkled for a moment into being, and then were replaced by others, thus forming on the heaving bosom of the sea constellations which lasted but a second, and then were swallowed up. Far away—as far as the eye could reach—the white-maned waves chased each other in a never-

ending race ; and as they rose and curled and broke each one was distinguished from the rest by its coruscating crest, which seemed to be steady for a moment, and then to scatter in a scintillating spray.

After an average allowance of calms and baffling breezes, the equator was reached and crossed ; in due time the Cape of Good Hope was rounded without more than the usual gales, and without any visit from the *Flying Dutchman* who is said to haunt the waters of that wild and tempestuous sea.

CHAPTER V.

HIRAM SHOWS HIS METTLE.

IN the days of which we write the route to Australia from England was very different from that followed by ships in more modern times ; and the *True Briton*, after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, steered an almost due easterly course across the Indian Ocean. Except in case of calamity, one voyage is very like another, and the monotony of life at sea offers but little scope for description. The passage of the *True Briton* afforded no matter worthy of record until she was nearly half way across that wide waste of water which stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to the shores of Western Australia.

By this time the passengers had not only found their sea legs, but had picked up a number of nautical phrases, which, especially in the case of the ladies, they used in the most inappropriate manner.

Hiram did not need to remember the trap which the captain had set for him, and into which he had so innocently fallen, in order to make him resolve to learn all that he could concerning the ship. From the beginning he had resolved to do this. There was no telling, he often thought, how useful such knowledge might be at a future day ; and in any case knowledge is a light commodity to carry and costs nothing in forage. Attracted partly by his willingness to learn, but more by his honest and straightforward character and his shrewd conversation, Mr. Braidwood, the mate, was always ready to give him information or to spin a yarn for his benefit ; and a thorough liking and respect sprung up between the

two. Not even the captain himself would now have tried a joke upon his ignorance. He had won the esteem of all, and was spoken of emphatically as a "decent fellow" and "a good hand." But an event occurred which increased the good opinion in which he was held—an event, moreover, which, as we shall see as this history develops, had an important bearing upon his fortunes.

It was a lovely night, the sky clear and studded with stars, the sea a deep blue, except where the crest of a wave showed for a moment a line of white. A fresh breeze was blowing, and the ship, under full sail, was speeding along at the rate of seven knots an hour, as gracefully as any of the birds which hovered in her wake. The passengers were lounging on the decks, the gentlemen enjoying their evening pipes or cigars, the ladies chatting easily. It was just such a night as brings thoughts—very tender and reverential thoughts—of home

to the voyager ; just such a scene as invites memories of the past and of dear ones left behind, and whose peace no one seems inclined to break by raising his voice or introducing any discordant theme.

Captain Parker and Mr. Hutchinson were pacing the poop in meditative silence, in which there was still a sense of companionship, when the captain, suddenly laying down his pipe upon the cabin skylight, walked to the break of the poop and stood sniffing the air.

“Mr. Bunce, Mr. Bunce,” he cried to the second mate, who was on deck at the time.

“Ay, ay, sir !” said Mr. Bunce, as he came up the ladder to the captain’s side.

“Do you notice any peculiar smell ?”

“No, sir,” said Mr. Bunce, sniffing the air in his turn.

“There’s something burning,” said the captain.

"I think it's a strong pipe one of the men is smoking on the main deck, sir."

"Is the fire out in the galley?"

"Yes, sir; the cook's turned in."

"Then go down to the main deck and see about that pipe. If any one is smoking there—either any of the steerage passengers or any of the hands—tell them to put out their pipes for a few minutes."

Mr. Bunce departed on his errand, the captain still standing in front of the poop. He had spoken quietly to Mr. Bunce, as he did not wish to cause any unnecessary alarm. For several seconds he failed to perceive the odour which had attracted his attention. Then it came back stronger than ever.

"There's something wrong, I'm sure," he said to Mr. Bunce, who, by this time, had rejoined him.

Springing down to the main deck he walked quickly forward on the lee side. The engine-room, containing a donkey

engine and a condenser, formed part of the deck-house occupying the space between the main hatch and the foremast. Here the smell of burning was strongest.

"There is fire not far from here," he said to Mr. Bunce.

"Oh, my God! don't say that," cried Bunce.

"Be quiet, you fool!" said Captain Parker sternly.

But others had begun to notice the ominous odour, and to collect round the officers.

"Call all hands," shouted the captain. "Carpenter, take a hand and open that main hatch."

All was bustle and confusion immediately. Some of the steerage passengers crowded round, asking questions impossible to answer, if any notice had been taken of them, and to which no attention was now paid. The gentlemen from the cabin had the good sense to return to the quarter-deck,

and to restrain the excitement and the curiosity of their feminine companions.

Almost as soon as the order for all hands to turn out was given Mr. Braidwood was on deck, his tall, half-dressed figure conspicuous among the rest.

"Come, clear out," he said to the people, who immediately turned to him with their questions.

"Mr. Braidwood, see that force-pump rigged and the hose fixed," cried the captain when he saw the mate.

"Ay, ay, sir."

And he elbowed his way through the people on the deck as easily as the ship was ploughing her way through the water.

"All passengers go aft to the poop," commanded Captain Parker, "except half a dozen to help with the pump."

As the people from the main deck flocked up the poop ladders, the carpenter and his assistant lifted off the first covering of the

hatch, and a thick cloud of smoke rose slowly and ominously into the night air, and was wafted away by the breeze. Some of the women screamed ; even the stoutest hearts among the men recognized the imminence of the danger in which they stood.

Captain Parker and the two mates now held a hasty conversation concerning the steps to be taken.

"Where has it broken out, Mr. Braidwood ?"

"Under the condenser I should say, sir."

"We must find out the exact spot at once."

"But how ?" asked Bunce.

"By going to see," retorted the mate, sententiously.

"I'll leave that to you then, Braidwood. Bunce, you take charge of the pump. I'll see to the boats. We may want 'em."

Captain Parker having appointed from among the passengers the persons most

likely to work the pump, ordered the sailors to prepare all the boats for launching at a moment's notice, and his order being readily obeyed, the four boats, large enough to carry all the people on board and an ample supply of provisions, were quickly slung in the davits ready for lowering away when required. The steward, with the assistance of Hiram and others, who were pressed into the service, were busily engaged getting ready water and food in a portable form.

Meanwhile, Mr. Braidwood had descended into the hold, and had received help from two of the hands in dragging several cases out of his way, so as to open a sufficient space for him to crawl in among the cargo, and penetrate several yards forward. The smoke was dense and bitter ; it almost blinded his eyes and stopped his breath ; but, with the cool, stern courage of a noble heart, he persevered. At length, he saw a smouldering mass, burning with a dull, red

glow. He had found the seat of the fire. Now, to commence the war with the enemy !

Working his way backwards along the top of closely-packed bales and cases, with barely space for the passage of his body between them and the under side of the deck, he at length reached the hatch.

“Give me the hose,” he gasped, holding up his blackened hand.

The hose was passed to him, and, grasping the long nozzle, he prepared to re-enter the smoke and darkness.

“Begin pumping in one minute,” he said, as he drew a long breath and disappeared.

The men at the pump worked with a will, the canvas hose, lying flat along the deck, swelled and rounded as the water was forced into it ; and the few people close about the hatch almost held their breath in the intensity of their excitement as they watched for what would follow.

The cloud of vapour, now mingled smoke

and steam, grew more dense as the water began to fall upon the burning cargo.

"My God, how thick it is!" said one of the men, pointing to the curling mass, as it mounted from the open hatch, and was carried over the lee bow by the wind.

"Do you see anything of the mate?" asked Mr. Bunce. "No one can live in such a smoke as that."

"We can see nothing, sir," said one of the men.

"Is Mr. Braidwood down below yet?" asked the captain, coming up at the moment.

"Yes, sir; he has been there some minutes now, and we've not seen him since he went in."

"He's speaking!" cried Hiram, who, having left his work in connection with the stores, in the hope of being able to lend a hand in extinguishing the fire, was now bending down, peering into the smoke, try-

ing in vain to see what was doing below. Before any one could interfere, he had swung himself into the opening.

“Bear a hand!” he shouted, “the mate has fainted.”

Mr. Braidwood, feeling that he could no longer endure the heat and vapour, had returned to the hatchway for a breath of air, but had not strength to reach the deck. He was lifted up, blackened with smoke, and utterly unconscious, was carried aft, and left in the hands of the doctor.

“He had just time to ask that somebody else should go in to direct the hose before he lost himself,” said Hiram, addressing the captain.

“Who’ll try it? Come, my lads!” cried Captain Parker. “Bunce?”

“No, sir,” said the second mate. “It’s certain death. I’d rather take my chance in a boat.”

No one else volunteered. The men

muttered that they would prefer risking the boats to being stifled like rats in a hole.

"Then I go in," cried Captain Parker, throwing off his coat. "Look to the pump, unless you're afraid to do that," he said to Bunce with undisguised contempt.

"You'll be wanted on deck, sir," said Hiram, interrupting him. He knew well that if the fire was not conquered the chances of saving life would be greatly lessened if any calamity befell the captain. "Let me go."

"That's right, my lad ; be quick !"

Hiram was down before the captain had finished speaking. He could feel the hose which had been carried in by the mate, lying like a cold serpent, over the bales and cases, and keeping his hand upon it, guided himself towards the fire. Then he felt the nozzle, from which the water was still streaming, and only needing a guiding hand to make it effective. At the same time,

though he was almost choked and blinded by the acrid smoke, he perceived a few glowing points of fire. The hold being so closely shut no flame had broken out, and these few sparks were all that he had to show him where to direct the stream of water. Crouching on his hands and knees he directed the jet on to the spot which had shown indications of being alight. Each moment the air seemed to grow hotter; each moment his breathing became more laboured. Was it true that no more smoke was rising? In that thick atmosphere he could only gasp like a drowning man; it seemed as if his chest were being crushed in; as if the hot blood rushing to his head were pressing his eyes outwards from their sockets. Then he saw Helen, his mother, Heather Street, with Dawson Schofield in the pulpit. Then came utter darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

LAND !

WHEN consciousness returned Hiram was lying in a berth which certainly was not his own, the doctor and Mr. Hutchinson by his side.

“ Well, my lad,” said Hutchinson, as Hiram opened his eyes, “ how is it now ? ”

“ Give—drink,” said Hiram, and the doctor raising his head, held a cooling draught to his lips.

“ Don’t try to talk,” said the doctor.

“ But what has happened ? Oh, I remember all. Is the fire out ? ”

“ It is,” cried Hutchinson, “ thanks to that brave fellow Braidwood and to you.”

"Thank God!" said Hiram, and he sank back upon his pillow satisfied.

"Where am I?" he asked a moment later, looking round. "Isn't this the captain's room?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "But I must forbid you to talk at present. You must keep as quiet as you can for a little while."

Two days passed, during which time Hiram received every possible attention. Several times a day the captain came to see what progress he was making, and to say a few kindly words. Mr. Hutchinson was often in and out of the cabin in which he lay; and Mrs. Hutchinson at least twice a day came in to make inquiries in her gentle voice. Miss Braceley remarked that of course it wouldn't be proper for her to go into a room where a young man was lying in bed, though really on board ship people seemed to do many things which they would never think of doing on shore; but

though prevented by her sense of propriety from visiting Hiram in person she charged her brother-in-law with several polite messages, which he always forgot to deliver. The rest of the passengers were no less attentive ; and it was plain that Hiram had won a place in the good graces of all, by his conduct in a trying emergency.

On the third day he was sufficiently recovered from the effects of his partial suffocation to be able to think coherently and to converse clearly and with pleasure to himself.

“Would you be kind enough to tell me what happened, sir, after I went down below ?” he asked the captain.

“Yes, yes. We stood watching there, at the hatchway, not daring to cut through the deck, or to open the fore hatch, for fear that the draught should start a blaze. From the time you went down the smoke became lighter, and by-and-by it ceased

altogether. Then we knew that the fire must have been mastered. I at once gave orders for you to be got out, as I was afraid you had been overcome by the heat and smoke. I had the fore hatch opened and the bulkhead cut through for the sake of ventilation, and two of the hands crept along until they found you. You were carried out, and put into my berth, and here you are," he concluded, with a smile.

"I'm sorry, sir, to be in the way," said Hiram.

"Pooh, man! A brave fellow like you is never in the way. I wish I could make you an officer in the place of that d—d skunk Bunce."

"I'm glad you're satisfied. I only did my duty."

"Sometimes it needs a brave man to do that."

"So it does," chimed in Hutchinson, who had come in unseen, and heard the last few

words. "It's all very well to call a soldier brave because when his blood's up he rushes upon his enemy and makes a hole through him with his bayonet. Why, I believe if I were put to it I could do so much myself. If anybody defied me I should want to have a try what I could do ; and then I suppose if I were to succeed people would say I was brave. Some courage is only a sort of hate or blood-thirstiness, which makes a man forget danger. It's a different thing when one goes into danger cool and with no enemy before him to act like a red rag on a bull. And that's what Braidwood did ; and what Greg here did, eh captain ?"

"Just so !" said Captain Parker, nodding his head, by way of emphasizing his assent.

"You'll excuse me, sir," said Hiram, "if I ask how you account for the fire. Have you any idea of the cause of it ?"

"The cause was clear enough when we looked for it. You know the condenser in

the engine-room has been in use every day for some weeks. Well, the heat from the boiler fire had cracked the cement over which it stood, the red-hot ashes had dropped through the cracks to the deck; the planks had smouldered until the ashes could fall through, and they had set fire to the cargo. It's a mercy things are no worse."

"And Mr. Braidwood? Was he much injured?"

"Not seriously. He's about again this morning, and talked of coming to see you."

A succession of fine days and favouring breezes sped the *True Briton* on her way, until on the ninetieth day out she rounded Cape Leuwin. This is a point which the voyager scarcely expects to pass without a storm, and the expectations of our friends in this particular were amply fulfilled. For three days they had what Captain Parker described as "a gale and a half," which resulted in some destruction of canvas and in

keeping the less hardened of the little community down below. But pleasant days and fair winds came at last ; and all on board were anticipating the end.

It was impossible that this end should be looked forward to without feelings of a mingled character. The prevailing feeling was, of course, that of pleasure. Life on board ship, where the company is limited and the range of interests small, which involves, for the time, absolute severance from the world at large, which takes one away from all knowledge of what is doing among our own small circle, and also of what is transpiring among the nations of mankind, inevitably becomes dull and monotonous. Dr. Johnson defined a ship as "a prison, with a chance of being drowned." And, so far as its seclusion goes, it is a prison, wherein one may become weary with sighing for freedom to mix with his kind. On the other hand, a dozen or

twenty people, who are in the closest daily contact, learn to know each other pretty fully in the course of a three or four months' passage, and the very absence of wider interests brings about a readiness to enter into confidences which would not be dreamt of under other circumstances, and a sympathy in respect to each other's affairs, often followed by true and lasting friendships. The quiet talks on the quarter deck, when the moonlight is glinting on the sea, when nothing is heard but the regular tramp of feet, the musical rush of the water as it closes in circling eddies in the wake, the occasional dash of a wave against the vessel's side, the creaking of a mast or perhaps a sailor's song—these rouse a regard which can hardly die out at sight of land, and furnish memories upon which it is delightful to dwell. But as the ship draws near to its destination, the reflection comes that those who have been companions

so long, who have shared the same interests, the same pleasures, maybe the same dangers, will be separated, most probably never to meet again. Each one will go henceforth on his own road, never, except by some strange chance, to be heard of more. And though the regret at parting may not be very deep, it is at all events sincere, until it is swallowed up by a crowd of new sensations and fresh experiences.

Towards the conclusion of a voyage there is generally to be observed among a set of passengers who have learnt to respect the captain of the ship a good deal of confidential whispering in groups, which at length develops into a formal meeting around the cabin table, conducted with all the elaborate secrecy of conspirators. This meeting takes place either when the captain is on deck or when he is taking his afternoon nap ; and while it is being held, if he is a man of tact, he is discreetly blind

and deaf. A day or two later a second meeting of a similar character is held, when one of the passengers produces a sheet of foolscap, from which an address is read for approval, wherein the urbanity and sailor-like abilities of the master are commended, which everybody, much to the satisfaction of the person who has put the address into form, thinks will do very well indeed. Each person then appends his or her signature, and it only remains to the conspirators to spring the mine which has been prepared.

All this, with some additional proceedings not quite so commonplace, occurred on the *True Briton*; and one day at the close of dinner Mr. Hutchinson requested that the captain would remain for a few moments, as he had something to say on behalf of himself and fellow-passengers. He also requested that Mr. Braidwood and the second steward would favour them with

their presence. The address to the captain was duly presented and acknowledged, and a bottle or two of wine opened by the captain's orders, in which he pledged everybody, and everybody pledged him and each other.

This ceremony completed, Mr. Hutchinson drew from his pocket two large envelopes, similar to the one which contained the document which had just been transferred to Captain Parker.

These envelopes contained more addresses from the passengers, conveying to Mr. Braidwood and Hiram a highly flattering acknowledgment of the conduct each had displayed at the time of the fire ; and asking the acceptance by each of a more substantial token of appreciation. Mr. Hutchinson explained that it was intended to procure a watch for the mate ; but as it might be difficult to get all the passengers together after their arrival, it had been deemed better to inform him of this intention, although a

presentation without the present might be rather like the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out. As to Hiram—whom he spoke of as Mr. Greg—knowing that he was a young man with his way to make, they thought perhaps a bit of ready money would be most welcome. He had great pleasure, therefore, in handing him the envelope, which contained five pounds ; and he would assure him that there was not one of the people who had joined in contributing that sum who did not feel deeply indebted to him, who did not admire, esteem, and respect him, and all who had taken this means of showing their feelings joined heartily in wishing him all prosperity and happiness.

Captain Parker followed, saying what pleasure it gave him to find the behaviour of his chief officer and of Greg so fully appreciated and so warmly approved ; especially as he knew that both deserved all that had been said of them.

Then Mr. Braidwood looked at Hiram, and Hiram at Mr. Braidwood. Each knew that their reply was waited for. The mate, who would have been perfectly cool even in a hurricane, seemed to find the necessity for uttering a few words a more trying ordeal than facing the wildest storm. What a horrible spell the idea of having to make a speech seems to cast over some minds, though in the absence of that idea they could talk well enough. What a pity the spell cannot fall sometimes on those voluble people who so dearly love to hear the sound of their own voices, and who are never so much in their element as when they can make an opportunity for saying a few words. After balancing himself, first on one foot and then on the other, and looking uneasily around, Mr. Braidwood summoned up courage and began.

“Captain Parker, and ladies and gentlemen,—I’m not much given to talking, and

hardly know what to say. It was rather a stiff job ; but of course it had to be done, and as chief officer it was my place to do it. I'm much obliged both for your letter and for what you intend to give me later. We've had a pleasant voyage together, and I'm sorry to part from you, and I wish you all well."

The passengers clapped and turned to Hiram.

"It would have been reward enough," he said, "for me to have known that I had been of some real use, as I feel much obliged to Captain Parker ; but I'm glad to know that I have won your good opinion, and also to receive your generous present, which will be very useful. Accept my sincere thanks for both."

Land was sighted the same afternoon, at least the officers declared they could see "the loom of the land." No less practised eye, however, could see more than a faint, hazy line on the horizon. But the report

that land was visible kept everybody upon deck until late, and prevented some from sleeping when they went below.

In the evening, the work of the day being finished, Hiram went to the fore-castle-head, and there stood straining his eyes in the direction of the shore. He saw nothing but the water and the sky, and was in fact more engrossed with memories and projects than in looking for the land. What should he do when he left the ship ? This was the question that presented itself again and again, to which he had as yet been unable to form any very clear reply.

“ Well, my lad, what do you intend turning to when you land ? ” Mr. Hutchinson’s question, breaking in upon his reverie, seemed like an echo of his own thought.

“ That’s just what I was asking myself, sir,” he returned. “ I don’t see my way clearly, but then I can’t expect to do that. I know so little of what is to be done.”

"Speaking generally, do you know who's fittest to give advice on any subject?"

"I should say," answered Hiram, smiling, "the man who's been successful in the same line himself."

"Not a bit of it," said Hutchinson. "That's a vulgar error. There are two classes of people who know better, and who think themselves specially competent. The first are those who have tried to do a thing and failed; the second are those who, not having tried, know nothing at all about it, and, therefore, are perfectly unprejudiced. If you are willing to receive advice from one of the latter class, I am at your service."

"Thank you," said Hiram, "I should be ready to receive advice; but I don't promise to act upon it."

"Ah, Lancashire is equal to Yorkshire in caution, and you're a wise young man. But, joking apart, I should like to give you a hint or two if you'd not think me meddle-

some. I've taken a real liking to you, and I should like to see you do well."

"You're gradely kind," said Hiram, the old familiar word slipping out before he was aware.

"My brother," pursued Mr. Hutchinson, "has been in the colony for several years, and has succeeded capitally so far. He has written home regularly, so that I know more about what is needed than many folks when they first come ; and I should say to you, don't stop about the town, but go into the bush at once. You can't get any work like anything you have been accustomed to, and you may as well try a complete change. I'm sure if my brother knew of you he'd be only too glad to get such a fellow as you on to his station. His place is eighty miles north of Adelaide. He has about twenty thousand acres of land, and I don't know how many sheep ; and one of his difficulties is to get good, trustworthy men. He's

rather odd in some of his ways, but he's a good fellow ; and if he takes to you—and I'm sure he will—there'll be no fear but what you'll be comfortably off before many years are gone."

"I know naught of sheep," said Hiram, somewhat dismayed.

"Perhaps not. But you can learn. And you needn't fear that he'll pay you more than you're worth. I'll answer for his not doing that. Anyhow, consider what I've said. You'd have to tramp the whole way unless by some chance you got a lift, which isn't very likely ; but if you think it worth your while I'll give you a letter of introduction which won't make your chances any worse."

"I'm much obliged ; very much obliged."

"Nay, lad ; not a bit. Shall I write the letter ?"

"If you please. Now, may I trouble you a bit more ?"

“Certainly. Anything I can do——”

“How can I send money home?”

“What! making a fortune already?”

“This five pounds——”

“Hadn’t you better wait a while, and see what you want, before you begin sending money home?”

“I shall never want it more than my mother does. I’ll chance it, choose how,” said Hiram, emphatically, again letting a bit of his native dialect escape him in his earnestness. “You see this has come to me, as I may say, providentially,” he continued, “an’ I should like her to share the first bit o’ prosperity.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Hutchinson, holding out his hand, “I had no business to say what I have said; and I didn’t wish to pry into your affairs. I’ll see you in Adelaide, and get you a draft for the amount. Good night!” And shaking Hiram’s hand warmly, Mr. Hutchinson

went aft, leaving the young man to his reflections.

On the one hundred and fourth day of her voyage the *True Briton* dropped her anchor outside the bar in St. Vincent's Gulf. Here the state of the tide made it necessary for her to lie until the next morning; and several of her passengers landed, among whom were Miss Braceley and Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson. Those who were compelled to remain on board feasted their eyes upon the pleasant prospect spread out before them.

A low sandy shore stretched away to the right. To the left, several miles inland, appeared the roofs of the town, clearly outlined in the pure air. It lay in the midst of a vast plain, bounded by a noble range of hills, wooded to their very summits; Mount Lofty, as the highest of these hills is called, standing out grandly and conspicuously in its garment of dark green trees.

Next day the *True Briton* was towed up

to her berth in the port ; and Hiram received his discharge, Captain Parker not forgetting his conditional promise relative to making an addition to the shilling a month which Hiram could legally claim as wages.

CHAPTER VII.

PERPLEXITIES AND ASPIRATIONS.

WHILE Hiram was still new to his prison life, Millvale seemed to have settled down into comfortable forgetfulness of him and his affairs. At least this appeared to be the case so far as the Whartons were concerned.

Dinner was over, and the gilded drawing-room was warm and cosy, every dangling lustre of the crystal chandeliers reflecting the light which was too weak to keep the mayor awake after the exertions of the day, and the equally arduous exertions of the prandial hour. So, allowing his newspaper to fall upon his knee, he let nature have her

way. Mrs. Wharton found ample employment in her novel, and in maintaining a perfectly lady-like attitude. Undisturbed by the elders, Charlotte and Henderson were left to amuse each other.

"I don't care to play any more," said Charlotte, as she closed the piano.

"I hope you don't find Beethoven prosaic?" said Henderson, with a smile.

"Not at all," returned Charlotte. "You seem determined not to let me forget my onslaught upon the characteristics of the present age. But I should not object in the least to your reminding me of it if I could only hope to bring you to my way of thinking."

"Now, supposing I admit all that you were contending for when we were interrupted——"

"Ah, by that poor girl, Helen Briggs——"

"Yes; but never mind her for the moment," said Henderson hastily, as if the

mention of her name brought some disturbing thought to his mind. "Suppose I admit all that you contend for, what remedy would you prescribe?"

"As to a remedy, I am almost at a loss. It is far easier to see an evil than to suggest a cure for it. Besides, the evil of which I spoke is so great and so complex that the difficulty is almost too great for one person—especially a girl—to face. The cure would have to be effected piecemeal."

"And where would you begin?" asked Henderson, only half seriously.

"The first thing is to persuade some persons to be a trifle less selfish, so that they should regard their own interests less and other people's more. Self-forgetfulness is the essence of all heroic action."

"A very noble sentiment, very well expressed!" said Henderson, with his amused contempt not quite concealed. "For practical purposes it is, however, a little too

general. What persons, now, would you select upon whom to display this persuasive power ? ”

“ Wealthy people, of course—employers of labour chiefly. The good things of the world seem to be divided in a shamefully unequal way. Some have a great superabundance ; others are nearly destitute. Then, between the different classes there is little sympathy, little attachment. Where now will you find the considerate and loving masters, or the faithful and loyal servants of whom we read in the past ? *Now*, the employer seems to care nothing for his workpeople except as they serve his purposes ; and the workpeople have naturally none of the loyalty which they might have under other circumstances. Their intercourse has degenerated into a war, or at the best a sordid bargain. Each one tries to get as much and to give as little for it as he can. What a glorious thing it would be for a rich

man to share his wealth, and so make many rich !”

“ Why, my dear Charlotte, you are a rank Socialist ! Suppose that all were equal in wealth to-day, do you think they would be equal to-morrow ? The careful man or the clever man would get the advantage over the prodigal or stupid one ; and so, very shortly, we should be obliged to have a redistribution. No, no, there is no equality in nature, and we can't have it in society. So long as there are the strong they will win the battle, so long as there are the swift they will be foremost in the race.”

“ Perhaps so ; but then they don't start fair. If all men were to begin life equal they would have a fair chance, and if they failed they would have only themselves to blame.”

“ I'm afraid nothing of the sort will ever be attempted outside of Utopia,” said Henderson, laughing. “ The world is cer-

tainly too practical to try anything of the kind."

"But at least why should not masters pay better wages than they do? Why should not you and papa give more to the people in the mills?"

"Because the rate of wages is regulated by the law of supply and demand, just as is the price of everything else."

"There you are with the bargaining spirit again!" exclaimed Charlotte, impatiently. "You take advantage of the poor creatures' poverty to get your work done for less money, and beat them down to the last farthing. The law of supply and demand wouldn't rule you if you didn't wish to be ruled by it. You could pay more if you chose to be content with less profits for yourselves."

"Could we? But, don't you see, that in the present age of competition we should soon be beaten out of the markets if we

tried to conduct business on anything but business principles. If we made the least advance in our wages, unless others did the same, we should be obliged to raise the prices of our goods, and then nobody would buy them. Ah! interrupted again. Here is Mr. Stapleton."

Mr. Stapleton advanced and shook hands with Mrs. Wharton, and Mr. Wharton rubbed his eyes and tried to look wide awake.

"I fear I am disturbing you, Mr. Wharton," he said. "I am sorry to interfere with your nap."

"Not at all, not at all, my good sir," returned the mayor. "I was not sleeping, but—a—slumbering like. Yes? yes."

"And Miss Wharton was trying to imbue me with some extraordinary notions of social economy," remarked Henderson.

"Yes," said Mrs. Wharton, "I have been listening to her absurd flights for some time.

I cannot tell where she picks up her ridiculous notions. I am sure she does not get them either from her father or myself."

It would have been passing strange if Charlotte had derived any but the most commonplace notions from either of her parents, unless, indeed, they had been suggested by force of contrast, those excellent barn-door fowls not being overburdened with a superfluity of ideas of any kind.

"And what," said Mr. Stapleton, "were these extraordinary ideas which Miss Wharton was ventilating?"

"She was preaching something very like Communism," returned Henderson. "At least she would like a wholly impracticable philanthropy to be introduced into business."

"I really do not know *what* I would have," said Charlotte, earnestly, laying her clasped hands upon the table, and looking thoughtfully at the minister, "but I feel

very deeply that there are many things wrong which I should like to see righted. It is horrible to think how many people are in want while others have more than they can use either wisely or well."

"I am glad to find that you think of such things, Miss Wharton," replied Mr. Stapleton. "But any remedy for deeply-seated social ills of old standing is very difficult to discover. To me it seems that two things are needed, neither of them, however, verging upon Communism. First, we need the repeal of the Corn Laws, so that the multitudes may not be heavily taxed in the fancied interests of farmers and landlords. The second is this: the labour upon which the community depends for the production and distribution of its wealth is most wastefully divided; and hence the wealth available for the supply of the people's needs is not nearly so great as it might be. One of the curses of the present day is the excess of what I

may call distributive labourers. We need more producers and fewer distributors."

"I can't see that," said Henderson, "while prices are low and markets are overstocked."

"But you see that poverty lessens purchasing power?"

"That is clear enough, of course."

"And that if the working classes, who form the bulk of the purchasers in our home markets, were better off they would consume more than they do at present, and that, consequently, there would be a brisker demand for almost all kinds of goods?"

"Yes; that is also clear."

"Well, now, if you have a large number of people who produce nothing, but who consume a good deal, the wealth of the community at large is reduced. And if they waste their labour they may succeed in obtaining a living for themselves, but they obtain it at the expense of others whose

labour is not wasted. False ideas of respectability, pure laziness, or selfish greed, have vastly overcrowded such occupations as can be carried on in a black coat. There are far more clerks of all kinds than are required; and as to shopkeepers, it is very much within the mark to say that, with proper organization, one might do the work which it now takes six to do, thus setting free the superfluous five for useful, productive labour. If labour were properly economized and directed, without any increase in its amount, I firmly believe there need be no want. But this is a large subject," sighed Mr. Stapleton, "and reform must be gradual. No logic will persuade men to adopt it excepting the stern logic of events."

It was with difficulty Mrs. Wharton hid a yawn, this topic having no interest for a mind so refined as hers.

"Shakspeare said that 'all the world's a stage,'" remarked Charlotte, "but, unfortu-

nately, we cannot arrange the drama that is acted out upon it according to our conceptions of poetic justice and dramatic propriety."

"Unfortunately ? say fortunately rather," returned Mr. Stapleton, gravely. "The Great Dramatist will make all end well at last ; and show us that life, which seems so chaotic or tragical to us, is not tragic in its end and final purpose."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Wharton, a trifle perplexed, "that you encourage Charlotte to talk about theatres, Mr. Stapleton. But you are not like other ministers who think theatres wicked. I don't think them so, of course ; but clergymen usually do ; and it is quite refreshing to find a clergyman with such liberal views."

Mr. Stapleton smiled ; but only replied—

"I don't think the theatre, as such, wicked in the least degree. It may be made evil in its tendencies. But we ought

not to judge an institution by the abuses to which it is liable."

"I quite agree with you. But what a pity that actors and actresses are such low people!"

"Are they?" said Mr. Stapleton, in a tone of incredulous inquiry.

"Why, of course they are," returned the lady. "At least they are generally reckoned so," she added, less confidently.

"Is such an estimate more than a vulgar prejudice?" asked Mr. Stapleton.

"Oh dear, yes!" cried Mrs. Wharton. "I know people who are not in the least vulgar who hold the opinion. I can't say that I know much about it myself, though I did see an actress at Miss Crimpton's yesterday."

"Did you, ma?" exclaimed Charlotte. "What was she like?"

"Why, really, I didn't notice the creature very closely. She came into the room to speak to Miss Crimpton while I was giving

some orders about my bonnet, and when she saw a lady present had the manners not to remain."

"How I envy her!" said Charlotte.

"Envy her! envy an actress!" cried Mrs. Wharton. "Do not be ridiculous, child!"

"Why do you envy her?" asked Mr. Stapleton, suspecting more with regard to Charlotte than could be understood by either her father or mother.

"Because," said Charlotte, seriously, "she has the chance of doing something with the powers God has given her, and can turn them to some account, even if only in the way of amusing others."

"But there are many ways in which such powers may be employed," said Mr. Stapleton.

"By girls?"

"Yes; in a town like ours no young lady need let her powers rust."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Mrs. Wharton, "if she mixes in society at all."

"How much might be done by persons of education and leisure," continued the minister, not noticing this remark, "I will not say in teaching the young, but in instructing those of older years in some things which they very much need to know! There are hundreds of wives and mothers who have passed the whole of their unmarried life in the mill, and who have no knowledge of the simplest principles of domestic management. What a work women more happily circumstanced might do among such as these!"

"But the education of few women of so-called education fits them for such work," returned Charlotte.

"True—and more's the pity," said Mr. Stapleton. "But I came to talk to Mr. Wharton about something quite different

from these things, if he can spare me half an hour."

"Certainly," said Mr. Wharton.

And the two gentlemen withdrew to the library.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. HENDERSON USES THE PRIVILEGE OF A
FRIEND.

AFTER Hiram's conviction Mr. Briggs interfered no more with Helen's attendance at Heather Street. On the Sunday following his release she knew that her lover intended going abroad without again seeing her ; and went to the afternoon service with a vague feeling of loneliness and desolation in her heart. Dawson Schofield, too, had heard of Hiram's departure for London, and his impending journey across the sea ; and as Dawson again happened to be the preacher for the day this knowledge resulted in sympathetic references in the public devotions.

"O Lord," prayed Dawson, in his simple

way, "bless our brother, who has had such a great trial of his faith and strength. Thou art the judge of a' the earth, and wilt set every wrong judgment right. May our brother's sorrow work to his soul's good. Guide an' protect him, an' all them 'at he's left behind. One of Thy sons of olden days started on a journey, not knowing whither he went; but Thou turned his feet into the right way. May it be so wi' Hiram Greg."

And a deep "Amen" rose from every heart.

At the close of the service, Helen said "good-bye" to her usual companions, and walked away alone. Instead of taking the direction which led to her own home, however, she followed the road leading up to the mayor's. Dawson Schofield had not had an opportunity of speaking to her before, and, wishing to have a few words, followed her up the road.

"Neaw, Helen, lass," he began, when he

came up with her, "Hiram's free once more. Thy heart's glad to-day, eh?"

"It is, an' it isn't," said Helen, walking on. "Hiram might ha' come to ha' looked at us afore going away. I'st nivver see him again."

"Tha mut keep thi' heart up, lass, an' not talk i' that'n," returned Dawson, reassuringly.

"But it's so long sin' he were here, an' he doesn't seem to care to come back."

"Eh, lass, he's nobbut anxious to mak' a clean start, an' win his way fur enow to fetch thi. Don't doubt Hiram. He's true as steel."

"Who is doubtin' him?" retorted Helen. "But it comes hard upo' me to be left so long."

"Where art tha goin' neaw?" asked Dawson, suddenly changing the subject.

"A-lookin' at Bridget an' Molly Fry," said Helen, in some confusion.

"This is roundabout for th' nearest, isn't it?"

"Happen it is. I wanted a walk. Yo've no need to go out of your road."

Seeing that she was in no sociable mood, Schofield left her to pursue her way alone. But he could not get her out of his thoughts. He wondered if she had some reason which he could not fathom for taking this unusual route. Then he thought what a foolish fellow he was to attach so much importance to such a trifling circumstance. "Lasses," he said to himself, "are given to whims. There's no accounting for many of their freaks. Besides, she's upset a bit to-day, and as likely as not she just wants to think quietly about Hiram." And this set the good man off wondering about the two young folks. Hiram he felt sure was, as he had said to Helen, true as steel, and there was no doubt that his affection would last through all his adventures and vicissitudes.

But would Helen's love be equally enduring and steadfast? Had Hiram been present, no question on this point could have arisen. And Dawson—who, as we have seen, had a streak of native poetry running through his rugged nature, like a brook running through a rocky dell—began to think of a wild convolvulus growing healthily, and holding up its white cups to the sky, so long as its support remained; but when its support was taken away, lying prone upon the ground, trailing its leaves and blossoms in the mire.

Helen was glad when Dawson Schofield left her, and she could let her thoughts run on without check. Like other weak natures, she was somewhat inclined to an indulgence in self-commiseration. And on this particular afternoon, when her loss was still new and her disappointment at not seeing her lover was still fresh, her self-pity became as nearly envy and bitterness as was possible in such a gentle heart. She saw some ladies,

dressed in fur cloaks and large muffs, who were returning from church, turn in at a gate which led up to a large house at some distance from the road. She could just see the windows of the house through the trees; and the dancing firelight within, after playing upon the curtains for a moment, seemed to leap forth to give them welcome. And Helen's imagination followed the cloaked figures, whose cheerful conversation and laughter still came to her in snatches; and she saw them in fancy going into the warm room, sitting in soft seats amid beautiful and costly objects, and with servants ready to obey their every wish. In what way were they better than herself? Did they deserve more than she? Yet she wore a faded shawl, and was obliged to go to the mill every day, and to work until all her limbs ached with fatigue and her head grew sick and giddy. Even when she went home there were the children to be attended to,

and bits of drudgery to be done, and old clothes to be mended, and her father's humours to be borne. Surely hers was a hard case ; and now Hiram had gone, and she should not see him again for years and years ! Having reached this point, the poor child wiped her eyes with the corner of her shawl, and feeling chilly as well as miserable, quickened her flagging pace.

Coming to the lane with the hedges on each side of it, she left the high-road. Evening was deepening into night, and here it was almost dark. She began to feel frightened, though of what she would have found it difficult to say. But every rustling movement of the trees made her start ; and she was glad when she came to the point where the hedges ceased, and the lane dipped down into the valley, and she could see the lights of the town away in the distance to the left. Was there any one near ? It was here that she had met Mr.

Henderson on the day of her appeal to Miss Wharton. Suppose he should happen—— Ah, there was a figure, resting one hand upon the rails, evidently watching for some one to come; and when she saw it she did not feel either so envious or so lonely.

“Good evening,” said Henderson, advancing to meet her, and taking her hand in his. “Why, Helen, how cold you are! You don’t mind me calling you Helen?”

“Helen’s my name, isn’t it?” she returned, looking up to him with a smile like that of a child when it is comforted.

“To be sure it is; and a very pretty name too,” he said, still retaining her hand. “I thought you might possibly be coming this way.”

“Did yo’? I didn’t know yo’ thought so much about it.”

“But you see I did. I often think about you; and I wanted to know how it is that this young man—young Greg—is running

off without coming back to Millvale. I shouldn't have thought he could have done that."

"You knew he'd gone to London, then?"

"Of course I did. The fact is, he has been a good deal talked of lately—that is, since he became so well known through his trial; and almost all the people who have taken an interest in him are aware that he has made up his mind to leave the country without returning home. I should think his mother feels it."

"And what do fowk say about him going away?" Helen asked.

"Well, opinions vary. Some folks think he is afraid to come back. Others say that though they cannot suppose he has any reason to fear, it looks as if he hadn't much feeling for his friends." Henderson watched Helen's face to see what effect his words would have. He half expected she would burst out with some denial of the supposi-

tion he had repeated. But she only asked him quietly—

“Do yo’ think that?”

“I really don’t know what to think,” he returned, weighing his words and watching her face. “I am very sorry.”

“Who are yo’ sorry for?”

“For myself first of all. I had promised myself the pleasure of helping him if he had only come back home and settled down in a rational manner. There is a place in the mill that would just have suited him, and that I intended to offer with terms that would have made it worth his while to consider it. And, you know, it is very disappointing to have such pretty little schemes fall through.”

Helen looked up admiringly and gratefully, thinking how kind and good Mr. Henderson was. So deep was this impression that she could find no suitable reply.

“But that is of very little importance,”

he continued. "I was more sorry for you."

"It is lonely wi'out him," Helen replied, her self-commiseration answering to this expression of compassion like an echo.

"Yes, if I may use the privilege of a friend and speak candidly, I should say that he ought to have considered you a little more than he has done. How did he know that you would wish to go to the other side of the world? He might have reflected that all your friends are in Millvale, where you have been brought up, and that you might not like to leave them thousands of miles behind."

He drew Helen's shawl more closely around her as he spoke, and she thought his hand trembled slightly when it touched her cheek. But the air was very cold — cold enough to make even a strong, good man like Mr. Henderson tremble. Perhaps for her sake he was angry with Hiram, who began to

appear harder-hearted than she had deemed him before. He was cruel indeed to leave her as he had done. Such were Helen's thoughts as the two walked on—on into the increasing darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLOTTE PROCURES AN INTRODUCTION TO
SOME MEMBERS OF "THE PROFESSION."

CAN the philosophic reader explain the nature of the power which, at certain seasons of the year, sets a flock of swallows circling and wheeling in the air, and, when their training, as a sporting man might say, is finished, drives them forth from beneath our chilly English skies, through the trackless fields of space, to winter in a sunnier land, and then brings them back to their familiar haunts along with the early summer flowers? Can he unveil the mystery of the inward impulse which, in the appointed time, causes the salmon to desert the clear ocean deeps,

and sends her on against the current of the stream, and makes her leap through the dashing spray of the waterfall until she comes to the sandy shallows, where, under the guardianship of her ferocious mate, she performs the duties of piscine motherhood ? “ Explain these things,” says our friend, the philosopher. “ Oh, certainly. The matter is clear enough. It is *instinct* that originates and guides the movement of both bird and fish.” It ought, surely, to be very satisfactory to be told so much. Our learned instructor has at least displayed his civility, and has shown a suitable condescension to our ignorance. Perhaps, however, we shall not be thought very stupid if we confess to not being much wiser than before, nor, we hope, shall we be considered to have overstepped the bounds of that modesty which becomes the unphilosophic mind if we venture to suggest that a label is not exactly the same as an analysis, and that, when a

name is given to a thing, the mystery of its being may yet be explained.

When the philosophic or unphilosophic reader has succeeded in giving us a satisfactory account of the origin and operations of instinct in animal, bird, or insect, and not till then, we shall be prepared to account for the mysterious impulses of human nature which start men and women on courses of action which lead to unseen goals. Meanwhile we must accept them as ultimate facts, like the chemist's "elements," beneath which we cannot penetrate, and incapable for the present of being resolved into any simpler component parts. Very often it is impossible to give a better reason why we did a certain thing than the lady's reason—because we did—and this, though the conduct may afterwards be justifiable upon rational grounds, or even bear the appearance of being the outcome of intelligent purpose.

It was some such impulse, we suppose, which sent Charlotte Wharton, shortly after the conversation recorded in a previous chapter, to call upon Miss Crimpton. She could not forget what her mother had said about seeing the actress, and she hoped that some kind chance would favour her in a similar way. Chance had so far favoured her as to lead to the discovery that her winter bonnet needed some alterations, which only Miss Crimpton could effect, and had thus provided her with a pretext for paying that lady a call.

Miss Crimpton lived in a tall, red-brick house, not far from the centre of the town. In ancient days this neighbourhood had been the favourite locality of Millvale magnates, and close around Miss Crimpton's establishment some of the very best families had resided. In the very house itself a banker had lived until he became rich and the fashion changed, when he removed out

of the district about which mills were crowding closer and closer almost every year. So rents had gone down, and in Miss Crimpton's day she, a lawyer whose practice was not very large, but whose family was, a couple of doctors, and a dentist, monopolized the row. In the late banker's dining-room she received her customers, and in its window three or four caps and bonnets of the latest fashion were displayed, while in the drawing-room above her assistants were busily employed. But in the house there were far more apartments than she required either for her business or her personal accommodation, and these, as she said, were made to pay the rent, by being let out as lodgings.

To hear her talk, when in a garrulous mood, which was of frequent occurrence, of "my ladies and gentlemen," as she designated her lodgers; and "my young persons," as she denominated the young women who

assisted her with the millinery, one would have thought that she was the owner of a collection of wax-works, so complete her sense of proprietorship in these people seemed to be.

She was a very little lady ; so little that it seemed quite preposterous to consider her in the light of the mistress of the large old house. But as in other cases of little folks, any one who had judged her mind by her body would have made a great mistake. It was a constant marvel to her acquaintances "that one small head could carry all she knew" about her neighbours' affairs and things in general. The degrees of relationship existing between any families of importance for miles around she could describe with the utmost precision and readiness. She was sure to have the first information in Millvale respecting births, marriages, and deaths, to say nothing of such preliminaries as engagements, or such sequels as testa-

mentary dispositions. Nor was she at all reticent in imparting whatever item of knowledge she had been fortunate enough to obtain on these all-important themes ; but would rattle away to any willing listener, as if talking were the greatest pleasure in life. Hence, she was a very popular personage ; and the flourishing condition of her business was attributable, in a great measure, to her personal popularity, as well as to the excellent style of the work done in her establishment. In the course of years she had become quite a Millvale institution, though for a long time after her settlement in that town she had been a mystery to its inhabitants. The solution of the mystery mostly favoured, and indeed generally accepted, notwithstanding the fact that she never either confirmed or contradicted it, was that in early life she had graced the stage ; and that she resigned her position as singing chambermaid, and for ever forswore the footlights,

when the leading gentleman of the company, of which she was a member, married a walking lady, who afterwards rose to eminence. Whether such were a true account of the case or not, she still showed a strong leaning towards everybody and everything connected with the theatre; and her lodgings were generally let to such leading ornaments of "the profession" as condescended to appear on the Millvale boards.

"Yes, yes, I understand perfectly," she said, as Charlotte finished describing the changes she wished to have made in her bonnet. "I shall not be able to let you have it home for a few days, because we are so busy at present with work which must be done before next Tuesday. On that day, you know, Miss Price is to be married to Mr. Emmanuel Hopkins. You know Miss Price and Mr. Hopkins, I dare say. Miss Price's mother was a Miss Twig—one of the Twigs of the Manor—and her father was a

son of his mother's cousin twice removed, who married—— ”

“ I have met Miss Price repeatedly,” remarked Charlotte, interposing to stop the flow of Miss Crimpton's eloquence. “ How dreadfully busy you must be with all the work connected with the millinery, and your lodgers as well. Have you many lodgers at present ? ”

“ Not many, my dear Miss Wharton,” returned the little woman, volubly. “ You see there is only a travelling company at the theatre at present ; and as I was very much engaged, in consequence of Miss Price's wedding, I did not care to take in many of the people. I can't look after them myself, under such circumstances, and you know what servants are in these days. If you leave things to them they are never done to people's satisfaction, and besides, they waste so much that there is no profit to be made.”

“Mamma thought she saw an actress when she called the other day.”

“Did she? Oh dear, yes. It was Miss de Sayne—Miss Eva de Sayne, you know. She happened to come into this room to speak to me about some trimmings for one of her dresses—I believe it was for the ‘Lady Macbeth’ dress—but I didn’t think Mrs. Wharton noticed her.”

“I wish I had been here at the time. I should so like to know an actress.”

“Would you, my dear? if you will excuse my taking the liberty of speaking to you in such a familiar manner. But you see my heart always warms to any one who is superior to the common prejudice against members of the profession. And I can assure you,—and I have had a good deal of experience and know what I am saying,—that, take them on the whole, they are as good a set of people as you will find anywhere. They have their faults, of course ;

but then who is without faults? That is what I should like to know."

"Not many people, I think," returned Charlotte.

"No, I should say not," resumed Miss Crimpton, quickly, warming to her subject. "And if they are rather extravagant, and improvident, why, it is better than being mean and niggardly; and their generosity to anybody in distress is so great as to be almost a fault. Besides, their life is so uncertain and unsettled that they have not the chance of forming the ties which do so much for humdrum and commonplace folks; and when they are good, as they often are—I think I may say as they generally are—why, it is all the more to their credit."

"Most assuredly it is," assented Charlotte.

"And Miss de Sayne—what is she like?"

"She's very nice—very nice indeed. And so clever! You should have seen her play

‘Lady Macbeth’ the other night. It was beautiful! It made my spine all creepy—just as if black-beetles were running up and down it. I declare I couldn’t sleep for thinking of it.”

“And is she as nice in private as she is clever on the stage?”

“Quite—she’s a delightful creature. At least I think so. But I suppose I am a partial judge. Would you really like to be introduced to her?”

“Very much if I had the opportunity.”

“Then, my dear, I’ll try if I cannot manage it. She is in her room now, I believe. Perhaps I can make an excuse for asking her to come down. Yes, I have a lot of cheap lace which might be useful to her. If she’s at liberty I’ll bring her down to look at it. You can be looking at these ribbons and flowers while I am away.” And with many nods and smiles the lively little woman departed on her errand.

In a few minutes she returned, the pleased expression on her face betokening her success.

"Miss de Sayne will be down almost immediately," she said, as she dragged a box out into the middle of the floor, and began turning out the laces of which she had spoken. "There she is!"

A lady, older and more matronly in figure than Charlotte expected to see, entered the room. She was tall and had well-formed features, but her complexion bore the grey tint which results from an habitual use of pigments. Miss Crimpton immediately engaged her attention with the contents of the box, while Charlotte made a pretence of being occupied with the ribbons which Miss Crimpton had given her to inspect.

"I hope you have found something that you like, Miss Wharton," said the little diplomatist, with a meaning frown. "Per-

haps you would like to look at this lace ? Here is a beautiful piece—the best imitation I ever saw.”

“ Very good, indeed ; any one might take it for real Brussels at a little distance.”

“ I have just been telling Miss Wharton about your splendid ‘ Lady Macbeth,’ ” said Miss Crimpton, “ and she regrets very much that she did not see it. But, dear me, how forgetful I am ! I have not introduced you. Miss de Sayne—Miss Wharton. Miss Wharton—Miss de Sayne.”

The two ladies curtsied with somewhat stiff politeness. Miss de Sayne for the moment felt a trifle vexed by having this introduction forced upon her. Actors and actresses were quite aware of the prejudice which existed at this time with regard to persons of their vocation ; and being as a rule both proud and sensitive—although exceptions to this as to every other rule existed—shrunk from any acquaintance

which on the other side involved anything approaching to condescension. Miss de Sayne was conscious that she was an actress. She did not know how far Miss Wharton might be willing to meet her as an equal, and did not wish to know any one who considered she was stooping from a higher sphere. On the other hand, Charlotte saw in Miss de Sayne a denizen of an ideal world—a woman who was working out her destiny in spite of conventional bonds—the representative of an art which she regarded with the utmost respect. But the constraint soon wore away, and they chatted freely enough about the various articles which Miss Crimpton displayed in quick succession. At length the conversation wandered off to theatrical topics, and finally Miss de Sayne invited Charlotte upstairs to inspect a dress which she was preparing for a new part, in which she was to appear on the following evening.

This invitation was, of course, gladly accepted, and Charlotte, forgetting what her mother would say if she could only know of her conduct, full of delight to be able to obtain what seemed to her almost as good as a glimpse behind the scenes, followed her new friend to her room.

Entering a back sitting-room on the first floor, the first object that caught Charlotte's eye was a closely shaven gentleman in a dressing-gown and slippers reclining comfortably in an easy-chair, studying a manuscript which he held in his hand. He looked round at the sound of voices, rose, and glanced inquiringly from Miss de Sayne to Miss Wharton. Charlotte would have withdrawn, but Miss de Sayne said—

“It's only my husband, Miss Wharton; come in. Mr. Everington—Miss Wharton.”

“I am honoured, madam,” said Mr. Everington, bowing; and speaking in a deep voice, and with as great solemnity as if he

were addressing a duchess on the stage.

“Let me give you a chair.”

“I was not aware——” said Charlotte, at first in perplexity, then breaking into a smile.

“That I was married?” said Miss de Sayne, finishing the sentence for her. “I dare say not. But, you see, if a lady has a good stage name it is desirable for her to keep it.”

“It wouldn’t do to announce everything on the bills,” remarked Mr. Everington, with the same solemnity as before. “We must consider the public, madam ; we must consider the public. And the public on the whole prefers unmarried ladies to married ones. And we must adapt ourselves, so far as we can, that is, to the public taste.”

“You have not been in Millvale before, I think, have you, Mr. Everington?” said Charlotte, almost at a loss for a remark.

“No, madam, I have not had that

honour. I trust the pleasure will be renewed before very long. I trust we shall leave some friends behind—public friends I refer to more particularly now—who will be ready to give us a welcome if we return.”

“I have no doubt of it,” returned Charlotte; “and I am glad that your success has been such as to encourage you to revisit Millvale. I regret to say that we have not been to the theatre recently. Papa is very much engaged, and mamma does not care as much as I do about the provincial theatre, though she goes very frequently when we are in London.”

“Not at all an uncommon circumstance,” said Mr. Everington, sadly. “Many people underrate the drama in the provinces, and, consequently, many an actor, whom the Fates have not placed upon the London boards, blushes in a measure unseen, and, comparatively speaking, wastes his sweetness on the desert air. And why?” asked

Mr. Everington, with an eloquent gesture. "Why should these things be? Does London hold all the genius of the world? No. Is the rest of the country, so far as dramatic talent is concerned, an arid waste? No. Are not the provinces the school in which the best actors are trained? Yes. May there not be some bright particular stars, whose beams have been obscured by—by clouds of—of envy and of circumstances generally, upon which the approving eye of a metropolitan manager has never gazed? There may. Whether," continued Mr. Everington, coming down from his elevated style somewhat suddenly, "whether we have such a star in our little company, I will not venture to say; but we have had a splendid success in Millvale—a splendid success. My wife here has made a great hit. Theatre has been crowded nightly."

"Well, well, never mind that, Reginald," said Mrs. Everington, as we must now call

her. She spoke a trifle impatiently, as if she did not quite acquiesce in her husband's highly coloured account.

"And," pursued Mr. Everington, not taking the hint, "my wife takes her benefit on Friday, and we expect to have a full house on the occasion. I think I can find a proof of the bill," he added, rising and opening a desk.

"Won't you look at the dress, Miss Wharton?" said Mrs. Everington. "The benefit bill will not be of any interest to you."

"Oh yes, I should like to see it very much," said Charlotte, referring to the bill, which Mr. Everington handed to her.

While she was looking at this document, Mr. Everington whispered to his wife, evidently making some proposition or suggestion from which she strongly dissented. Her frowns and shakes of the head, however, he answered pleasantly with smiles and

nods, as if she were in full agreement with him.

"What a splendid stage figure," he remarked admiringly, in a loud "aside." "A thousand pities she does not belong to the profession. But she is above it, far, far above it!"

"Thank you, Mr. Everington," said Charlotte, returning the bill, her cheeks flushed as a consequence of having overheard, as Mr. Everington intended she should, his laudatory confidences. "Both you and Miss de Sayne appear, I see; and you offer a most tempting programme."

"No doubt about the crowds on that night, I should say. I wish the theatre was double its actual size. We have already booked a gratifying number for the best places."

"Then I fear you will not have any tickets to dispose of?"

"I hope not on the night. I think there

are a few seats not yet appropriated. Perhaps, my dear, you will be good enough to refer to the plan."

This request was accompanied by sundry frowns and nods ; and Mrs. Everington, seeing that her husband was determined to carry his point, complied with as good a grace as she could assume.

"There are some still to be disposed of," said Mrs. Everington.

"But we are expecting Colonel Pegginthorpe to take the stage box ; and a party from the Hollies ought to have nine—or is it eleven ?—stalls," continued Mr. Everington, bent on enhancing the value of places by giving an impression of the difficulty of obtaining them.

"You must let me have some tickets for the stalls, please," said Charlotte. "Could I have three now ? I do not know how large our party will be ; but perhaps if I let you know to-morrow you would be good enough to reserve more for us ?"

"Thank you, madam, thank you," said Mr. Everington, carelessly pushing on one side the money which Charlotte placed upon the table. "We might arrange to put in a few extra chairs if we knew in time. So if you will be good enough to let me hear to-morrow—— It is a pleasure to meet with one who so thoroughly appreciates the drama and its representatives—however humble those representatives may be."

"I am sure Miss Wharton is appreciative enough to satisfy even you," remarked Mrs. Everington, sarcastically, her eyes flashing in a manner which boded no good to her husband when the opportunity came for expressing her sentiments to that gentleman in private.

"She is, my dear," replied Mr. Everington coolly, letting his hand fall as if by accident upon the money lying on the table. "Ours is a delightful art, Miss Wharton—an art which not only enables us to shoot

folly as she flies, but to hold the mirror up to nature, and reflect the noblest passions of the human soul."

"Delightful indeed!" cried Charlotte. "Would you pardon my asking, Mr. Everington, if it is very difficult to enter your profession? I know that it must require long training and study before one can expect to take high rank; but is it very difficult to make a beginning?"

"Again you show your good sense, madame. Most people who know little or nothing of the stage think it quite easy to do what only persons who have gone through the mill ought to attempt. Almost all novices think they ought to commence with leading business. But you are too penetrating, you have too just an estimate of the actor's art to make any such mistake. As to a beginning, that is not difficult if the candidate possesses a good face and figure. Appearances go for a good

deal with the public, and we must study the public."

"I fear I am trespassing on your time," Charlotte said as she rose. "I had almost forgotten the dress," she added, apologetically, as she followed Mrs. Everington into another room.

CHAPTER X.

THE DAWN OF ETERNAL YOUTH.

THE spring and summer of the year wore slowly away, and yet his friends in Millvale had heard nothing of Hiram. During these months of waiting his mother's feeling in regard to him gradually modified. Hitherto, as we know, it had been her pride and consolation to believe that he had shared in the violent measures of the more headstrong and unreasonable of his Chartist associates, and that he was indeed guilty of the offence for which he had been punished. But as time passed on almost imperceptibly a change came over her mind; and she grew into the habit of thinking of

him as an innocent martyr to untoward circumstances and mistaken testimony. Her resentment, which had formerly burned so hotly against the class above her in the social scale, gradually turned itself towards the persons through whose conduct her son had fallen into trouble and been driven from his home and from her side. She had in fact arrived at the mental position which Hiram would have wished her to occupy ; and his behaviour, which she had been driven to adopt a not very flattering hypothesis to explain, now appeared clear and consistent throughout. The bitterness and the doubt which had filled her heart both vanished, and she remembered him and hoped for him with the utmost tenderness.

This alteration was owing partly to the softening effects of time and reflection ; partly to the affection and thoughtfulness which he had shown in sending to her the money which the Heather Street people

had intended for his own use. The help thus given enabled her, with her own work in the mill, to support herself and the two children in tolerable comfort. She knew that Hiram would not forget her necessities ; and though she could not see her way very far ahead, for herself and those dependent on her, she looked forward in a fairly calm and trustful spirit. But as the weeks and months went by, bringing no tidings of her son, her heart ached for some word about him—to know at least that he was still alive.

Between the trial and his release from prison one of her greatest comforts had been Helen's frequent visits. She had never thought that Helen was worthy of Hiram ; but what mother ever did think a young woman worthy of an only or a favourite son ? Still she thought that Helen loved him, and sorrowed for his absence ; and when Helen was with her the two would

sit by the cottage fire, and Mrs. Greg would recall the half-forgotten incidents of his childhood and youth, and relate them for Helen's benefit in the fullest detail, and Helen would listen quietly, perhaps adding some reminiscence of his singing at Heather Street, or of some speech she had heard him make. Then they would fall into silence, each knowing that the other was thinking of him in his captivity, each weeping noiselessly for his and her own grief.

But after he sailed for Australia these visits became more rare. Helen, too, always seemed uncomfortable while she remained, and in a hurry to be gone. Finally they ceased altogether, and since early in the spring Helen and Mrs. Greg had not met.

Meanwhile, the distress continued in the town, and the utter collapse of the scheme, from which such notable results had been expected, added to the gloom of those who had built their hopes upon its success.

Chartism seemed to fight in vain against the mighty forces arrayed against it. The authorities in Manchester and elsewhere were apparently determined to crush it at any cost. Vast numbers of arrests were made, and many of its staunchest and boldest friends were thrown into prison or sent across the sea, thus crippling the movement by the withdrawal of some of its most ardent supporters, and by teaching caution to those leaders who were still at large. Besides this cause of declining strength there were internal dissensions among the Chartists themselves, and where they had failed when a tolerably united party they were not likely to succeed when they were split up into hostile factions engaged in mutual fault-finding and recrimination. The Anti-Corn-Law agitation was also daily assuming greater proportions, and winning a firmer hold upon the public mind. O'Connor worked eagerly to set his followers in opposition

to the agitation of which Richard Cobden and John Bright had come to be the recognized leaders; but the trust with which he had been regarded in the past had waned, and many persons, who had at one time joined the cry of "The Charter, and nothing but the Charter," were led to support the reform which seemed at once more practicable, and to promise more effective and speedy relief to the distress of the people. In Millvale, since the great outburst of the previous autumn, political strife had been almost suspended, and, like the rest of the working-class politicians, Mr. Briggs was waiting, with gloomy discontent, for the turn of events. Disappointment soured him more and more—he was censorious, morose, and irritable at home, seldom speaking to his children, excepting to find fault; and no greater proof of his wife's steadfast faith could be given than the fact that she still continued to believe that he was "good at bottom."

Notably with Helen he had been exacting and suspicious for some time. He could not help seeing that she was grieving in secret, and, at first, he attributed it to Hiram's absence. Hating Hiram as he did, with the blind hatred of a partisan, he resented his daughter's attachment so deeply that the aversion he felt towards the young man gradually extended to her. But with the autumn came a discovery that made him forget what he looked upon as the faults of the young man who had been imprisoned a year ago, that filled him with pitiless anger, and the home of which he was the head with mourning that could not be comforted.

* * * * *

The children were in bed, and an unnatural quiet pervaded the room. A tallow candle with a long wick flared and guttered on the table; the light quiveringly reflected in the brass candlesticks on the mantel only serving to throw deeper shadows into

the corners. Mrs. Briggs sat erect on one side of the fire, the tears rolling silently down her cheeks and splashing upon the backs of her hands. Only the old man was with her, and he had been dozing for an hour in his large armchair, muttering a few words occasionally, or smiling in his sleep. Rousing himself, he looked vacantly round for a moment, and then, resting his eyes upon Mrs. Briggs, he said, in a slightly querulous tone, "Helen—where's Helen?"

Mrs. Briggs made no reply until the question had been several times repeated.

"Hush, hush, father," she said, in a broken, frightened manner, as she went and stood by his side. "Don't breathe her name. Isaac says we mutn't—. Oh, my lass!" And she covered her face with her apron, and, leaning her head upon the old man's chair, sobbed aloud.

"Poor child—poor little 'un! Is she so bad as that? I didn't know she were ill.

But my memory fails me neaw," he said, with pathetic perplexity, raising his trembling hand to touch his daughter's face. "Ah," he continued, his gaze wandering round the room, as if he were trying to recall some event which he dimly remembered, "Isaac were angry wi' her, but he's a good lad, Isaac, though his temper's hot awhiles."

Mrs. Briggs had not heard the latch softly lifted, nor did she notice the cold air that swept into the room.

"Mother!"

It was Helen's voice; and Mrs. Briggs turned and saw her child almost crouching in the doorway, her eyes full of piteous beseeching.

Mrs. Briggs held out her arms, and in a moment Helen was folded to her bosom, and only kept from sinking to the ground by her mother's grasp.

"Oh, my lass! my child!" cried Mrs. Briggs, "I thought tha'd gone away. But,"

she added, in apparent fright, "he'll be coming back. Go to bed till mornin', an' then——"

"I durstn't stop—I durstn't see him again," said Helen, shivering.

"Tha shalt stop! I'm thi mother, an' tha shalt not go out into th' neet wi' no place to rest thi head."

"No, no!" Helen moaned. "He said he'd kill me if he saw me here again. Oh, mother, one kiss!"

"I have been young, an' now am old," said the old man, raising himself to a standing position with the help of the arms of the chair. He had not stood upright for many days without the assistance of his daughter or his son; and his action so surprised Mrs. Briggs that she sprang to his side, afraid that he would fall. His eyes were fixed, and there was a strange tremor about the muscles of his mouth. "It's little Helen—my pretty little lass," he said, reaching out

his trembling hand. "Her feyther's vexed—vexed. 'Let him that is without sin——' Betty, where am I?"

"Sit deawn, feyther," said Mrs. Briggs, in distress. "Helen, get some water," she cried, as the old man's form slowly sank back into the chair.

"Why, it's Jane," he said, smiling into her face.

Helen bent over her mother when she handed to her the water which she had brought, and kissed her cheek.

"Th' gates are openin'," continued the old man, raising his head. "I see th' streams an' flowers, an' light. Jane, tell Isaac to say his prayers—'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive——' "

His eyes closed; his body relaxed; he had entered upon eternal youth.

Mrs. Briggs tried to press the water to his lips and to raise him in her arms. But in a few moments she knew that he was no

more on earth ; and she turned to speak to Helen ; but Helen had gone, and Isaac stood looking with a puzzled, awe-struck expression at all that remained of his father.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD SAMARITANS.

“WELL, we mut go to bed, I think,” said Miss Fry, “but I don’t think I con sleep wi’ this wind. It’s awful! I’m glad there’s nob’dy we care for at sea to-neet.”

“Does tha believe sperrits can feel th’ wind?” asked Molly in a subdued tone.

“Sperrits! What makes thi talk o’ sperrits?” inquired Miss Fry, looking round as if half apprehensive of seeing some ghostly visitant flitting round the little kitchen.

“I welly allus think of ’em i’ a storm,” returned Molly, “when th’ wind is blowing hard an’ we hear queer sounds like groans an’ screams. I shouldn’t like to dee o’ such

a neet as this. I should be feared my soul 'ud be blown about i' th' air, an' 'ud be a long time i' gettin' up to heaven."

"Eh, lass tha's no need to fear," said Miss Fry, shivering at the suggestion, nevertheless. "Him 'at calls th' soul away con take it swift an' safe through a' th' storm. But th' wind is awful to-neet," she added. "I seemed to hear a cry just then."

"No human flesh an' blood 'ud be out. It mut be either th' wind or sperrits," said Molly listening, as if for a repetition of the sound.

"It's th' boughs o' th' trees creakin', an' th' rain an' leaves beatin' again' th' windows."

"Hark!" cried Molly, "that's neither trees nor wind."

They listened for a second, and in a momentary lull between the gusts they heard a moan as of some one in distress quite close to the door.

"Who's theer?" Miss Fry shouted, put-

ting her mouth near to the key-hole, and speaking in an alarmed and agitated voice.

Another moan and a feeble beating on the door were the only answer.

“Oppen th’ door,” exclaimed Molly.

Almost before the words had passed her lips, Miss Fry had begun to undo the fastenings with trembling fingers; and now it required their combined strength to prevent the door from being thrown open by the boisterous wind. They held it ajar, and peered out into the darkness.

“Who’s there?” repeated the elder sister.

“It’s nobbut me,” a weak voice replied.

“It’s a lass,” said Molly.

“Come in, whoever it is,” said Miss Fry.

“Why,” she added, her eyes having become accustomed to the darkness, “oo’s kneelin’ theer i’th’ wet. Get hold on her, Molly. Th’ poor thing mut be ill.”

Molly obeyed, and half carried, half dragged the kneeling figure into the kitchen,

while Miss Fry, after a severe struggle, succeeded in closing the door.

“Oo’s soaked wi’ rain,” said Molly.

“Why, Helen !—”

“Oh, don’t send me out into th’ darkness,” sobbed Helen. “Let me stop here to-neet, an’ I’ll go away somewhere to-morrow.”

“Eh, tha bad lass !” cried Miss Fry. “So this is what tha’s come to, is it ? Tha might weel not come a-lookin’ at us for months an’ months ! An’ now how has tha face to come near to honest fowk ! Poor thing, oo’s welly dead !”

“An’ sarve her reet !” chimed in Molly, the tears streaming down her cheeks, while she undid the clammy bonnet-strings, and supported Helen on her chair. “To think ’at oo could be fause to that lad, an’ him away across th’ sea, workin’ to make a home for her. Now, Bridget, take her boots off.”

“An’ thee shut up,” said Bridget, pulling

off Helen's boots. "Oo's a bad lass, but it's noan for us to find fau't wi' her. Just get some hot water to put her feet in ; an' set th' kettle on so 'at oo can have some tea. I wonder what I'm crying for. Oo deserves to be turned out again ; such a wicked thing."

With such mingled and contradictory utterances, the good old souls divested Helen of her wet and clinging garments, and did all that lay in their power to make her comfortable. By dint of questions, interspersed with reproaches and expressions of pity, they drew from Helen that her father had driven her from home ; that she had waited near until she had seen him leave the house ; that then she had ventured to go back to ask her mother for a kiss before leaving her for ever ; that while she was there her grandfather was taken ill, and that she, hearing her father's footsteps as he came up the street, had fled in terror, not

knowing where to go. She had, she said, wandered about in dread and misery until, almost without knowing where she was, she had found herself near to Birk's Cottage, and she made another piteous appeal to be allowed to remain until the morning.

There was no need to make this appeal, however, the last thought in the sisters' minds being that of sending her out into the tempestuous night. In a strange flutter of indignation and compassion they put her to bed, and having given her a cup of hot tea, and done all that was possible to save her from the consequences of the exposure to the weather which she had undergone, they left her for the night.

"Oo connot stop here," said Miss Fry, when they returned to the kitchen.

"Of course oo can't," assented Molly. "We're respectable fowk, an' can't do wi' sich as her."

"Then there's that poor lad i' Austrália,"

exclaimed Bridget. "I'm fair mad when I think o' him. It'll break his heart."

"He's not sich a foo'," returned Molly. "He'll see 'at he's well rid o' sich a wicked lass."

"Well, tha's no need to be so very hard on her," said Miss Fry, wiping her eyes. "Oo's nobbut a child, poor thing."

"Who is hard on her?" retorted the younger sister. "Oo's naught! But what con oo do—where con oo go, if we turn her out?" And Miss Molly rubbed her cheeks with her apron.

"Who's goin' to turn her out?" asked Miss Fry, sharply.

"Tha said oo couldn't stop."

"An' so did tha."

"Nivver mind!"

"I don't mind."

"Then don't talk any more o' sendin' her away till this wind's done."

So in a state of sad perplexity the two

elderly ladies retired. But Miss Fry could not sleep until she had relighted the candle which had been extinguished, and had tip-toed into the room where Helen lay with tear-stained face, fast asleep. The face looked very innocent, like the face of a sorrowful child; and as the light fell upon it, the mouth quivered and the breast heaved with a sob. Miss Fry, looking round to make sure that her sister had not followed her, bent down and touched the pale forehead with her lips.

Next morning Helen was too weak and ill to rise. Nothing was said as to her leaving Birk's Cottage by either Miss Fry or Molly; on the contrary, they attended to her with the utmost tenderness, making a thousand excuses and apologies to each other, as if they were committing some most flagrant sin, vying with each other in expressions of indignation, protesting in every form of words they could devise that their anger against her knew no bounds.

That day passed, and another, and yet another. Still Helen remained at Birk's Cottage. She was feeble from excitement, anxiety, and sorrow. The greater part of each day was spent sitting in an easy-chair, and when either of the sisters looked at the sad, infantile face, the tears would spring to her eyes, and she would rush away to give vent to her feelings in an angry outburst of bitter censure, taking the utmost care, however, that no word of the censure should reach the ears of her against whom it was directed.

This was very inconsistent conduct, no doubt, and, perhaps, will bring upon the two old maids the condemnation of some moralists of the sterner sort, who, before all things, would have word and action to correspond. There are, however, worse faults than inconsistency, especially when the inconsistency is the result of an excess of real charity—charity which, while seeing a

wrong, yet deals very mercifully with the wrong-doer. At least so we imagine it will appear when the Heavenly Record is revealed to human eyes, and we learn the estimate put upon our doings by Him who sees things as they really are.

But if Miss Fry and Miss Molly were guilty of inconsistency with regard to Helen, no such charge could lie against them with regard to another person whom, from the first moment that they knew of Helen's trouble, they suspected as its cause. Against him their hearts were hardened like flint, and very little mercy he would have received if their judgment upon him could have taken effect. Each glance at Helen's sorrow-stricken face served to inflame their wrath against this person still more. Through any trouble, through any loss, through poverty and worldly abasement, they would have been true to him; even through any minor evil, as in face of

any accusation which it might seem possible to meet or to satisfactorily explain, they would have held to him, and defended him, and believed the best of him. But when their suspicion became a certainty he was torn from their hearts, and covered in their thought with their most righteous scorn and indignation.

Helen did not propose to go away, and no hint was given her to leave. Where, indeed, could she go? So she remained, sad and grateful, until November came.

But before this time Miss Fry had heard that letters had arrived from Hiram, giving an account of his voyage and of the prospects opening out to him. It was pretty well known throughout the little community at Heather Street that Dawson Schofield and Mr. Stapleton had each received a letter, and it was whispered that in addition to her own Mrs. Greg had received one addressed to Helen. But Miss Fry only told her sister

of these things, and their talk about them, with the tears and scolding of which they were the occasion, kept them up late one night after Helen had gone to bed.

They had learnt, too, shortly after Helen threw herself upon their mercy that her grandfather was not ill only, as she had thought, but they did not tell her he was dead. And when Mrs. Briggs came, as she did not long after the funeral, they first ascertained that she had no purpose of reproaching Helen, and then, after warning her in a hurried whisper not to mention the death of old Mr. Briggs, they let her see her daughter. Her visits were necessarily few, as she was bound to come either without her husband's knowledge or with the certainty of incurring his sullen anger upon her return.

One dark, drizzly evening in November she appeared at the cottage door. Before she had time to knock it was opened by Molly.

"How is oo?" asked Mrs. Briggs, anxiously.

"Middlin', but very weak," returned Molly.

In a few minutes more Mrs. Briggs was by Helen's bedside. There she lay with a little child folded close to her breast. Her mother bent over her and kissed her brow. Helen did not raise her eyes, but simply put out her disengaged hand, and feebly clasped her mother's fingers.

Mrs. Briggs had aged in appearance during the last few months; her red and wrinkled face had its lines more deeply ploughed; her hair was more thickly sprinkled with grey. But though these changes were most apparent, there was another, less definite, difficult to describe in words, more felt than seen. She had softened in manner and voice; and when she spoke Helen was not afraid of her as she expected to be.

"Mother," said Helen, feebly.

"Well, my poor lass?" said Mrs. Briggs, bending over her again. "Nay, yo' needn't go," she added to Miss Fry, who was about to quit the room.

"I'd better," said Bridget, and she gently closed the door.

"I'm very sorry."

Mrs. Briggs had to bend down close to Helen to catch these words.

"Ay, lass, I know tha art."

"Will yo' ever forgive me?"

"Eh, my poor child, tha needn't ax that! I wish I could do more for thi nor that."

There was but a dim light, yet that showed a glistening tear on each of Mrs. Briggs' cheeks. They were silent for some seconds; then Helen lifted her eyes.

"Mother, come close; I want to whisper. Do yo' think God'll ever forgive me?"

"Ay, lass, ay. God's as good as me."

"If ever *he* comes back," said Helen, after another silent pause, "happen yo'll tell him

'at I werena good enow for him. Tell him I'm very sorry. Tell him not to think about me at a'. It'll be better for him to forget me as if I'd never lived."

Mrs. Briggs begged her not to dwell upon distracting thoughts ; and with gentle sympathy soothed her until she fell asleep.

A week later Mrs. Briggs stood again by Helen's bedside. The poor, thin face was upturned ; the hands were crossed upon the breast. An expression of peace, such as her mother remembered seeing years ago when she was a child, seemed to hover about her mouth ; and looking at her now one might well have thought that she had been nothing but a child.

It is better so ! It is better that she should not be forced to go out again to face the world. It is better that God should call her, for He will not forget her weakness, and He will deal more tenderly with her frail spirit than would men.

Her babe had been but a feeble, flickering life at best. In the evening they laid it by its mother's side, and then the room was still.

Fall lightly winter's earliest snow upon the grave where Helen and her baby rest ! Gently cover it with soft, pure flakes of white ! So may thoughts of pity and of tenderness descend upon her memory, and bury out of sight all that belongs to earth beneath a mantle of Divine forgetful charity.

CHAPTER XII.

CHARLOTTE WRITES A LETTER.

ON the evening following Helen's funeral Charlotte was alone in her own room. A bright fire burnt in the grate, and its ruddy light danced and flickered upon the pictures and the pure white curtains of the bed. The comfortable easy-chair in which Charlotte loved to curl herself up, when in a musing mood, seemed to hold out its arms invitingly. But, to-night, her book lay neglected, and she was in far too excited a mood to be able to sink into a delicious reverie, to indulge in her habit of castle-building, or to lose herself in vague thoughts of woman's powers and opportunities, or in equally formless and

undirected dreams of social amelioration. Hitherto she had been little more than a spectator of the drama of life ; she had not been called upon to act her part in what is so often a comedy of errors, or a sad tragedy of tears and pain ; she had been but a critic, with little of the real knowledge which experience alone can give, and though not a cynical or unfeeling critic, not fully able to appreciate the impelling motives of those more actively engaged. Now, however, questions had been forced upon her attention, courses of conduct were opening out before her, which made it imperative that she should form decisions of the most momentous kind. She must be prepared to act in a manner that had charms for her, but that would certainly involve the grieving and the thwarting of those whose feelings and wishes she was most in the habit of respecting ; or she must in yielding to those persons lay not only her future life and hopes of happiness,

but her very self-respect, upon the altar of filial affection. She was torn by contending feelings. Dressed in a loose wrapper of creamy white, her long hair floating down upon her shoulders, and with bent head, she paced the room, or rested for a moment, only to start up once more and resume her walk. Every thought that occupied her mind, every emotion that agitated her heart, showed itself in the changing expression of her face. Pity, at one time, shone in her eyes ; then the red blood mounted to her cheeks, and as she held her burning face with her hands her eyes blazed with an indignant light ; again indecision came upon her, and throwing back her head her lips moved as if in unspoken prayer. Going to the window, and drawing back the curtain she looked out into the night. The air was clear and still ; a few stars shining down upon the world ; the moon, nearly at the full, bringing the naked branches of the trees into full relief, and

making the distant church tower stand out distinctly in ghostly white. She looked out upon the calm and peaceful scene, but without any appreciation of its beauty. But while she stood gazing, holding back the curtain with her upraised arm, the conflict which had been waged in her heart came to an end ; and letting the curtain fall suddenly she walked to the table with the decision of one who has formed a settled purpose, laid out pen and paper and prepared to write. At first she apparently had some difficulty as to her mode of expression ; but soon the pen was travelling quickly across the sheet, and she paused no more until her letter was completed. Having folded and fastened it, she placed it on the mantelpiece with a sigh of relief.

She then counted the money in her purse and put the purse in a small travelling-bag upon the table. Into the same receptacle she put all the jewelry which she took from

a small case upon the dressing-table, a miniature of her father and of her mother, and some articles of clothing, and having laid out a dark-coloured dress and her bonnet, without undressing, put out the light and threw herself upon the bed.

"Humph," said Mr. Wharton, warming himself after the manner peculiar to the free-born Briton, as the servant brought a covered dish into the breakfast-room next morning, "Humph! Smells like stewed kidneys. Good, very good. Yes? yes."

Mrs. Wharton, not seeing anything in these remarks calling for a reply, silently drew the water from the hissing urn into the teapot, while her spouse continued to divide his coat-tails and to revel in the heat of the blazing fire, made pleasanter by the anticipated delights of the stewed kidneys and the other good things spread out upon the table.

"Charlotte not down yet?" continued Mr. Wharton.

"No ; she worked herself up into a state last night, and probably has a headache this morning," said Mrs. Wharton. "She'll be here soon, no doubt."

"Ah," cried Mr. Wharton, helping himself to toast, "I cannot understand people who make a habit of being late to meals. Punctuality is the soul of business ; and though I trust I do not care too much for the—a—the enjoyments of the table, I look upon it as a great mistake to be late for meals. You keep other people waiting, and you give the food time to spoil, which is a great shame, and, indeed, seems like ingratitude. Yes ? yes."

Charlotte did not come, however ; and when Mr. Wharton had taken off the edge of his appetite, he turned to his wife with the remark—

"Perhaps you had better send a cup of tea up to her."

"I'll wait a little longer," returned the lady.

"I hope she has come to her senses," said Mr. Wharton, doubtfully, looking to his wife for some confirmation of his hope.

"It's very absurd," replied Mrs. Wharton, "to run away with such romantic notions! I can't understand it at all. Young people in my day were taught to obey their parents, and not to set up their own opinions."

"Quite right, quite right, my dear. But Charlotte will insist on thinking for herself."

"She does not suppose," continued Mrs. Wharton, "that we should wish her to do anything that is not right; and surely we ought to know what is right and prudent and convenient as well as she can."

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Wharton, as if he would like to assent to his wife's proposition, but felt a little misgiving in his own mind.

Another quarter of an hour passed; and then Mrs. Wharton sent a servant up to Charlotte's room to make inquiries. The

servant returned with a perplexed countenance.

"Miss Wharton is not in her room, ma'am ; and if you please, ma'am, I do not believe she has been in bed last night."

"Nonsense !" cried Mrs. Wharton, as if the servant had offended her by her remark. She, however, left the table and went upstairs to make her own observations. She came back pale and agitated, holding a letter in her hand.

"Walters is right," she said to her husband, in a tone of mingled anxiety and annoyance. "Charlotte is not to be found ; and this letter was left on the mantelpiece."

Mr. Wharton was at once infected with his wife's alarm. His brow contracted, and his lips trembled.

"She cannot have done anything desperate," he said, as he nervously took and tore open the letter. "But she's an unaccountable girl—very."

“My dear father and mother,” he read, “though I would not willingly inflict pain upon you, I cannot, and will not, marry Alexander Henderson, after what I have learned of his conduct. When the engagement took place between us I was young and impulsive, and did not fully realize what a serious step I was taking in promising to become his wife. For some time I have felt more and more deeply that we were unsuited to each other; but I have battled with the feeling, and tried to beat it down. This was while I thought him at least an upright and honourable man; now I have lost my respect for his character, and cannot think of him without loathing and contempt. To marry him would be a degradation to which I cannot submit. I remember, as you told me to-night, that the sin of which he has been guilty is one which many men commit without being branded as they deserve by the society in which they

move, and that there are women who, while they would not let his victim touch their garment's hem, would treat him as if he had committed a very venial wrong, if they considered that he was stained at all. But I cannot thus regard him. I should feel myself polluted by his touch, and if I promised either to love or honour him I should be uttering a lie. Again, I say, I neither will nor can marry a man who has so insulted me—who has blackened his soul with so foul a crime against an innocent girl, and thus brought her in shame and misery to her grave. I cannot understand why you both should urge me to still hold myself bound to him, and to still abase myself by listening to his false words. If I were to see him I should only shrink from him, as from some disgusting reptile. If he were to speak to me I should only repay him with the utterest contempt and scorn. Were I to treat him otherwise, I should feel that I had

sunk to his level, and entirely lost my self-respect. As he is papa's partner, I can understand that it will be disagreeable for papa to be obliged to tell him of my decision ; but if a daughter cannot look to her father to protect her from shame and insult, to whom can she look ? And, while I am sorry for the pain papa will feel, I cannot blame myself for it—the blame must rest upon him who has made it needful for me to take this course. Dear father and mother, do not think me unfeeling. I am sure you do not understand the repugnance which I feel, or you would not have urged me so strongly to marry this man. But, as you insisted on my seeing him again, as you insisted upon my ignoring the evil he has done, as you failed to comprehend the humiliation any further contact with him would be, I have felt bound to go out into the world, to work in some way for my bread, where I shall never see him more.

Forgive me the pain my going may cause.
May God bless and keep you.

“Ever your affectionate daughter,

“CHARLOTTE.”

Mr. Wharton groaned as he finished reading this letter, and passed it in silence to his wife. She perused it without remark, flushing and turning pale by turns.

“The headstrong, ungrateful creature!” she exclaimed as she ended. “She has, I am sure, a thoroughly vulgar mind, or she would not use such revolting language! Why could she not have ignored the mistake which that young man has undoubtedly made? What a scandal, what a horrible scandal, it will be when it is known that your daughter—your daughter, Mr. Wharton—has run away from home!”

“I don’t know what will be the end of it,” said Mr. Wharton, gloomily. “I have been a fool—a fool,” he muttered; “but I

have done my utmost for him, and he cannot blame me."

"It is society I care about," said Mrs. Wharton. "As for Alexander, why, you must reason with him, and if he will not listen to reason, defy him to do his worst!"

"And his worst," said Mr. Wharton, slowly and hoarsely, "means ruin!"

"Ruin!" gasped Mrs. Wharton. "Are you so completely in his power as that?"

"Completely!" returned Mr. Wharton, letting his head fall upon his hand so as almost to hide his face. "But," he cried, rousing himself with an effort, "what are we thinking of? Only ourselves? I have tried to save myself by sacrificing my child, and she has rebelled—and—and fled. I cannot blame her. But we must think of her as well as ourselves. We must find her and bring her back——"

"And *make* her marry him," interposed Mrs. Wharton.

"No," said he sternly, and with a real dignity of which he would hardly have been deemed capable. "No, I'll make no further attempt to outrage her feelings or to lead her to destroy her self-respect; and I'll face the worst as well as I can, though it will be hard to begin the world again."

"Ah, well," said the lady, looking at her husband with languid scorn, "there is time enough to talk of that. Now, where are we to look for her?"

"Where are we to look for her? I really do not know. She gives no hint in her letter."

"No, indeed; she is too crafty to leave much trace behind."

"For her sake, my dear, speak a little more kindly."

"I ask again, Mr. Wharton, where are we to look for this girl?"

"Suppose we begin by questioning the servants. Some of them may have seen her leave the house."

“Question the servants ! Are you mad, too ? Why, if we did that the story of her disgraceful flight would be all over the town before night. We must do nothing of the kind. We must simply tell them that she has gone away unexpectedly to pay a visit to some friends, and so stop their gossiping tongues. We must not have it known that she has run away, or we should be overwhelmed with disgrace.”

Mr. Wharton saw the force of his wife's arguments ; and was sadly puzzled to suggest any plan of search. They canvassed the probability of the fugitive's having gone to some friend in Millvale, which they decided was not at all likely. Then they went through the list of friends and acquaintances at a distance, but could not call to mind any with whom it would be probable that Charlotte had taken refuge.

“She speaks,” said Mr. Wharton, after this consultation had proceeded for some

time, "of earning her own living. Have you any idea as to what she could think of doing?"

"Not the least. Oh, to think that my child has sunk so low as to talk of working for her bread? What can have become of her pride?" This thought was too much for Mrs. Wharton's refined nature to bear; and she pulled out her handkerchief, arranged it in graceful folds, and wept.

"What can she do unless she takes to teaching?" asked Mr. Wharton.

"Or accepts a housemaid's situation," wailed the afflicted lady.

"Or dress-makes," suggested the father. "I'm sorry we've driven her to this. But," he added, brightening, "she can't earn much at any of these things; and she certainly has not any great amount of money with her. She will not find earning her own living as easy as she seems to expect; and when she feels the shoe pinch, she will be

glad enough to come back home. Yes? yes."

This view of the matter appeared to afford both Mr. and Mrs. Wharton considerable satisfaction ; and as they could not take any active steps for tracing the runaway without exciting the scandal they were so wishful to avoid, they decided to announce that their daughter had gone on a visit, and to patiently wait the turn of events.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LONELY WALK.

It was fortunate for Hiram that he had a small sum of money in his possession after sending the five pounds to his mother. He had decided to act upon Mr. Hutchinson's suggestion and seek his fortune in the bush, and he needed money to buy the few articles requisite for his long and lonely tramp. Blankets, tea, matches, a "billy" in which to boil his water, and a few other small articles which were not too cumbersome to carry, and which, he was advised, would be of use, were soon provided, and, having written his letters, received a missive from Mr. Hutchinson, and said good-bye to his

friends, two days after he landed he "humped his drum," as the colonials put it—that is to say, he shouldered his bundle—and started upon his walk.

Through the Yorkshireman's intervention he had made the acquaintance of persons in Adelaide who were able and willing to give him information as to the route to be followed, and as to the shifts by which travellers through an almost uninhabited country are enabled to dispense with the accommodation of inns. Reliant on his own strength and sagacity, he left Adelaide early on a fine winter's morning, hoping, if he did not lose his way in the bush, to reach his destination on the third day. At first the road was good, and for many miles signs of human life and activity were about him on every side. Leaving the streets—which at this period were marked out, but contained comparatively few buildings—and the few one-story houses, chiefly with verandahs

shading the windows, which stood among their gardens on the northern side of the town, he emerged into the open plains. The early rains had already fallen, and the grass by the wayside and on the great stretches of pasture-land was beginning to push up bright green spikes amid the blades which lay prone and withered by the scorching glare of the summer sun. Already patches of verdure contrasted refreshingly with the bleached expanses which had not yet begun to revive after the droughty months. A heavy dew had fallen in the night, and a light cool mist ascended from the ground when the sun rose swiftly above the horizon, shooting level beams across the country and making every leaf and blade sparkle as if hung with diamonds. It was a morning to make one feel light-hearted and hopeful even in a strange land and far away from friends; and Hiram whistled cheerily while stepping briskly on towards

the rising ground which he saw ahead. By-and-by the road began to slope upward, and he felt the weight of the "swag" or long bundle, slung at his back, over one shoulder and under the other, and containing a change of clothing, the necessaries for his journey, and a few books. Coming to a space where the trees on either side were less dense, he stopped to rest and look back.

Below him were dark green woods, chiefly of gum or eucalyptus. Near the foot of the hills, nestling among trees and gardens, were three or four low-roofed houses, looking snug and comfortable ; at wide intervals, among the vast fields into which the plain was divided—some of which, where the wheat was sown, of a pale, reddish brown ; others covered with the parched remains of last year's grass, among which the new herbage was beginning to peep, where sheep and cattle grazed—were to be seen little clusters of buildings, dwarfed by distance, the homes

of the men and women who were turning the land which so shortly before was the haunt of the black fellow and the kangaroo, into one immense and fruitful field. The mist by this time had entirely disappeared, and the air was clear and light. The buildings in Adelaide itself were distinctly visible; and away to the left a streak of silver sea glistened in the morning sun. Hiram rested and looked until his attention was attracted by the screaming of flocks of small parrots and parroquets which wheeled and fluttered among the trees, flashing here and there in all the pride of their gaudy plumage—green, yellow, scarlet, crimson—filling the air with a constant succession of harsh, shrill cries.

Before noon he turned from the road, unslung his swag, and, in the shade of the forest, made a hearty meal. Here he had time to note the peculiar appearance of the trees. Many of the gums, which were the largest and most numerous, stood with their

great trunks nearly devoid of bark, looking like immense dried bones. Some were but hollow stems, but above the gnarled trunks and twisted branches of the greater number there spread thick masses of deep green foliage, which rustled pleasantly in the breeze. These, but for the bareness of the trunks and the elongated leaves, would have reminded him of English elms. A few shea-oaks, with their dark corrugated stems, and dull, spiky foliage, were observable at intervals, and wattles, not yet in bloom, formed the undergrowth. Among these trees small parrots abounded, and black and white magpies uttered their sweet but monotonous note.

After resting for an hour, Hiram resumed his journey. During the afternoon he only met one person on horseback, and saw in the distance, far away in the hollow of the undulating country which he had now reached, a settler's home. He was anxious

to reach a station of which he had been told, which lay from Adelaide about a third of the distance which he had to travel. When he had gone a little more than twenty miles, so far as he could calculate, he caught sight of a flock of sheep quietly browsing at the foot of a low, grassy hill. The road now was but a track, the silence and loneliness were oppressive, and he therefore hailed the sight of the sheep with gladness. Leaving the track, he hastened in the direction of the flock, and, as he approached, a man rose from the ground where he had been reclining, and shouted a welcome. He had a bronzed and weather-stained face, and his dress was rough and coarse. But in his manner there was a freedom and hearty friendliness, which at once prepossessed Hiram in his favour. After a warm greeting, and many questions as to Hiram's whence and whither, he reluctantly allowed the traveller to depart, first giving him

minute directions as to the locality of the head station of the run on which he was employed as a shepherd. A walk of two miles over slippery grass brought our traveller to the end of his first day's stage, and at the close of a day's hard tramping the prospect of rest was very pleasant.

The "station" consisted of a four-roomed house, built of wood and roofed with shingles, with an enclosed yard or paddock, containing a shed for horses, and having one or two small outbuildings in its vicinity. A roughly fenced patch served as kitchen-garden, and here some young fruit-trees—apples, pears, plums, and loquots—promised well for future years. A large sheepdog gave notice of the visitor's approach, and a neatly dressed woman appeared at the door. Her face shone with delight at the sight of a stranger, and her cordial invitation to Hiram gave him a pleasant impression of bush hospitality. It needed no great pene-

tration to see that she was a lady ; but she had evidently adapted herself to a settler's life with the cheerful tact and readiness of a kindly and sensible nature. Two tanned and freckled children—a boy of seven and a girl some two years younger—hung shyly about her skirts while she conducted Hiram indoors. Here she explained that her husband was out, but expected home shortly, and then began to ply Hiram with questions relative to “home,” and was delighted to find that he came from Lancashire, she and her husband having left Cheshire only two or three years before. But amid all her eager inquiries she did not forget the duties of hospitality, directing and helping a younger woman in the preparation of tea. While the mutton chops on a large gridiron were still hissing and spluttering over the glowing embers of the wood fire, the children waiting at the door cried that father was coming ; and shortly after he came in,

hungry after many hours in the saddle, but ready to join to the full in the rare privilege of entertaining a guest, especially one who had so recently come from "home."

The tea and chops and home-made cakes quickly disappeared, and then followed a long and pleasant chat, Hiram feeling more as if he were among old friends than among strangers whom he had never seen before, and would probably never see again. But, in such a place, the conventionalities of older lands are unknown. Visitors are like angels, few and far between, and, in the bush home, the hosts feel that the obligation is on their side, rather than on that of the guest—at least, if he will talk of the dear country far away, and give them some tidings of the outside world from which they are, in a great measure, cut off. But the evening came to an end, and Hiram was shown to his bed made up on a couch in the sitting-room.

With many kindly farewells he left next morning, his host accompanying him far enough to put him in the track from which he had diverged. All day long, with the exception of a break at noon, he steadily pursued his journey, finding little need of the pocket compass with which he had been wise enough to provide himself in case he should go astray. The way led chiefly over a wide, uncultivated plain, but towards evening he came into a better-wooded district, and was fortunate enough to find a creek of tolerably good water, near which he decided to camp for the night.

Having selected what seemed to be a suitable spot, he lit a fire and placed his billy, filled from the creek, upon it. When the water boiled he threw in a handful of tea and some sugar; and drawing the food with which he was provided from his bundle, ate and thought. Night, without the long twilight to which we are accustomed in

England, settled down upon the land, and the only sounds to be heard were the crackling of his fire, the moan and rustle of the trees, and the sharp screams of the opossums which came out of their hiding-places in the hollow trunks and branches, glared for a moment at the light, and then ran nimbly into the highest boughs. Above, the stars shone clear and fair ; but in their passionless calm they seemed to intensify the loneliness. How many thoughts of home chased each other through his mind ! The darkness and the quiet at first depressed him ; but as he became more accustomed to them his spirits rose, and in a not unpleasant frame of mind he piled more branches upon the fire, loosed his blankets, and laid himself down to sleep.

Sound sleep, though under unusual circumstances, followed an arduous day, and next morning, before the sun rose, he was ready to resume his journey. His limbs

were stiff, it is true, as a consequence of his recent exertions, but a few miles of brisk walking took the stiffness away ; and when he rested at midday he had, if his calculations were correct, only about ten miles to cover to reach Boorunga; Mr. Elkanah Hutchinson's run. While he rested he noticed, about half a mile from where he sat, what at first he took to be a herd of cattle. But as he watched, several of the creatures raised themselves on their hind legs, and in moving leaped or hopped, rather than walked ; and when they came nearer he saw that what he had taken for cattle were in reality kangaroos. They, however, did not approach him very close ; and, as he did not feel very certain as to what their behaviour was likely to be, he did not regret that they kept at a respectful distance.

The latter part of the journey was, perhaps, the pleasantest of the whole. Not only had he the anticipation of soon reach-

ing the end which had been before him all along, but the country became more home-like in appearance, notwithstanding the bleached herbage which covered the ground in many places, and the strangeness of the native trees. After crossing a long stretch of nearly level country, he entered a wide-mouthed valley, which became narrower the further he followed it, until for half a mile it was almost as narrow as that Lancashire clough, in which nearly a year ago he had first told Helen of his love. He was obliged to cross a brook three times in order to keep his course; and on either hand the ground rose steeply, both banks being wooded to their summits by gums, shea-oaks, and wattle. How fondly he remembered that dewy morning in far-away Lancashire, when he plucked the white hyacinth, regretting that it was not a lily!—the morning on which he and Helen agreed to walk together up the hill of life. But he could not pause

to indulge in such seductive reflections ; and so, after a deep draught from the creek, he pressed on once more.

Rounding the foot of a mound which jutted out into the path which he was following, he saw that the ground rose all around, and that a pretty stiff ascent lay before him. Half an hour's walk brought him out to an elevated plain, almost devoid of trees ; and perhaps three miles away, where the ground again became uneven, he could see a roof, and blue smoke curling upward. There, he felt no doubt, was Boorunga, and his journey seemed to be already at an end.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW MASTER AND A NEW LIFE.

HE had not gone far across the plain when he perceived a horseman riding towards him as if for dear life. A very few minutes brought the impetuous rider within hailing distance.

“Hi ! hi !” he shouted.

“Hi ! hi !” returned Hiram, hardly able to restrain a laugh at the figure before him.

The stranger was a tall man, loosely built, with light blue eyes, ragged light brown hair, and long, straggling whiskers of a similar hue. He wore neither coat nor vest, and an old pair of corduroy breeches were fastened by a broad leather belt around his

loins. A low-crowned hat was jammed tightly on the back of his head, and he carried a heavy riding-whip in his hand. But it was his appearance of being in a towering rage which made him seem irresistibly comic to Hiram, no cause of anger being evident or imaginable.

"What are you laughing at? Who are you? Where are you going? What do you want?" he cried fiercely, reining up his horse close to Hiram.

"A good deal to ask a man all at once," returned Hiram. "Who might you be?"

"I might be the devil. Answer me at once, before I lay my whip about you," cried the irate horseman, throwing his horse, by a dexterous turn of the wrist, directly in front of Hiram, thus bringing him to a halt.

"Look here," retorted Hiram, feeling his temper rise, "I don't know who you are, and I don't care. You'd best keep a civil tongue in your head, whoever you are. If

you mean to be awkward, it might be as well to bear in mind that that's a game two can play at."

"Come, be reasonable, man," said the rider, suddenly dropping his tone of passion, whether real or feigned, "be reasonable, and give a civil answer to a civil question."

"I will as soon as you ask one."

"Why, I've asked half a dozen already," the tall horseman replied, reining his horse alongside Hiram again, and speaking in a voice of quiet but impatient expostulation. "I'm Elkanah Hutchinson, and you're on my run. There's Boorunga, my place. Now who are you, and what do you want?"

"My name's Greg, and I want you."

"Well, here I am; what do you want with me?"

"I want you to give me work."

"A nice tale that! You're a new chum?"

"I've not been in the colony a week."

“And who’s sent you to me?”

“Perhaps you’ll read that.”

Hiram drew a letter from his pocket, and held it out towards the proprietor of Boorunga.

“Bah! Testimonials to character are no good. The best testimonial to a man’s character is his face, and that, like all other certificates, lies as often as it speaks the truth.”

“I think you know the writer of this letter,” said Hiram, still holding it at arm’s length. Remembering what he had been told of Mr. Elkanah Hutchinson’s eccentricity, he was not offended, but only amused by his odd and abrupt behaviour, now that he knew with whom he had to deal.

“Then why don’t you give it to me?” exclaimed that gentleman, snatching at the package, and looking hastily at the address. “Whew!” he cried, recognizing the handwriting, “William’s fist, or the cleverest

forgery out. Do you know William—my brother, I mean? Has he landed? Why don't you speak?"

"He landed six days since. I came out in the same ship, the *True Briton*."

"Come on to the station then, quick, and I'll see what he has to say about you."

The last few words of this sentence were almost lost upon Hiram, the impetuous gentleman having given his horse a cut which made him start forward, and soon he was far away towards the station. At no great distance from the house both horse and rider momentarily disappeared, leading Hiram to infer that there was between him and his destination a narrow gully which he would be obliged to cross.

This inference proved correct. When he had trudged on towards Boorunga about two miles from where the interview had taken place he found himself upon the steep bank of a watercourse. This creek in the summer

time was little more than a succession of water-holes ; even now it hardly deserved the name of a brook. But it had eaten out for itself a deep bed, along whose bottom it glided, when Hiram first saw it, clear and pleasant. A transverse path on either side led down to a shallow ford ; and here there was no difficulty in crossing.

The head station of the Boorunga run was a comfortable-looking one-story house, surrounded on three sides by a deep verandah. Not far away were railed yards, wool-sheds, and other minor buildings. As Hiram approached, two sheep-dogs sprang forward and gave him a noisy greeting, which might be construed into either a warning or a welcome. A middle-aged woman, of pleasant appearance, Mr. Elkanah Hutchinson's house-keeper, who had been apprised by her master of his approach, appeared at the door, and, after calling the dogs away, conducted him through a cool passage into the kitchen.

Here he deposited his bundle, and gratefully accepted Mrs. Cudworth's invitation to be seated. He had hardly taken a seat, however, when the master's voice was heard from one of the front rooms.

"Hi ! hi ! Greg, are you there ? Why don't you come here ? Come here at once."

"Master's odd in his ways," said Mrs. Cudworth, with a smile, as she showed Hiram into Mr. Hutchinson's room. "But he's one of the right sort when you know him ; and he's taken to you already."

Hiram was glad to receive this latter assurance on such good authority, more especially as he would not have suspected that such was the case from Mr. Hutchinson's behaviour ; but he discreetly held his tongue.

He was shown into a room with an uncarpeted floor, but furnished with more regard both to comfort and elegance than he would have expected to see in such an out-

of-the-world place. He noticed in particular two sets of shelves, one on each side of the wide fireplace, well filled with books.

"So you're one of those foolhardy fellows who risk their lives for other folks, are you?" said Mr. Hutchinson, as he entered.

"Do you hear? Why don't you speak?"

"I don't quite understand," said Hiram.

"Bah! William's told me all about it, so there is no need for mock modesty; mock modesty's a bad sign. What about the fire aboard the ship?"

"I'd really forgotten it at the moment, sir," returned Hiram.

"I dare say! Well, what can you do on a sheep station?"

"I don't know; but I'm willing to learn."

"Well, that's something. Can you ride?"

"I never was astride of a horse in my life, but I could learn that, no doubt."

"Do you think I keep a school to teach all the incapables in the colony? How

much are you prepared to pay for learning all these things; you don't expect to be taught for nothing, eh?"

Hiram saw a twinkle in the light blue eye of his questioner, and only smiled in reply.

"Well," continued Mr. Hutchinson, relaxing into a smile, on his part, "you seem to be—mind, I say, seem to be, because there's no telling until one's tried—you seem to be a trustworthy sort of fellow, and we'll see how we get on together. Sheep have a habit of increasing in numbers, and one consequently needs more hands to look after them, so that if you like to try what you can do as a shepherd you may. What shall we say as to wages to begin with?"

"That I must leave to you, sir. If you give me what you think I am worth I shall be satisfied, and shall be glad to gain experience."

"Just so! And then go off to somebody else, who'll pay you better. Suppose we

say four pounds a month and rations to begin with?"

"That will satisfy me, sir," said Hiram, well pleased with what appeared to him liberal remuneration.

"Now, go out, and tell Mrs. Cudworth to give you some supper, and when she's done that ask her to send that boy Dick to the Beacon Hut, to tell Blundel that I want to see him here to-morrow morning early."

"Yes, sir."

"But, look here," cried Mr. Hutchinson, calling Hiram back, "let me advise you to learn to ride just as quick as you can. There's no telling of what use it may be to you. You'll find an old saddle in the harness shed, and you might use up whatever spare minutes you may happen to have in catching and mounting any horse that is at liberty. You may be useful if you learn to ride."

By six o'clock next morning Hiram was

again called into Mr. Hutchinson's room, and found him in company with a dark, keen-eyed man, who was in reality about thirty years of age, but looked considerably older.

"This," said Mr. Hutchinson, abruptly, "is Greg. Greg, this is Blundel."

Blundel bowed, and Hiram rather awkwardly returned the salutation.

"Mr. Hutchinson tells me that you are just out from home, and that you are coming down to our hut. I hope we shall be good friends out here, where friends of any sort are scarce."

Blundel spoke with the quiet self-possession of a man of education and refinement, and Hiram felt at once that his new companion was a gentleman.

"Thank you," said Hiram, "I hope we shall be friends."

"Well, take him off," said Mr. Hutchinson, "and make the best of him you can."

He's not the first apprentice you've had, Blundel. I hope he'll turn out better than some of the rest."

The two men left the house, and after a four miles' walk through the fresh morning air came to the hut. As they went, Blundel explained that this was one of several huts occupied by the shepherds employed on the Boorunga run; and that before Hiram's advent three men lived in it, himself, another shepherd, and a hut-keeper. He also gave the new-comer a general idea of the life upon which he was entering, and the duties he would have to perform.

"The fellows at the hut," he added, "call me Gentleman Blundel, and, as we are to be companions, I may as well tell you the reason of this at the outset. My father was a squire in one of the Western counties, and like many another young fellow, when I went to Oxford I went to the bad, involved myself in debt and difficulties, lived an idle,

loafing life in England for a while, and five years ago came out here to expiate my misdeeds and make a new start. Some day I may go home again, when I can do so without being too much ashamed to show my face. All sorts of causes bring men out here, and a queer mixture is sometimes the result. Life in a young colony makes you acquainted with strange bedfellows."

The hut was a poor-looking structure of wood and clay, roofed with bark. Inside, the middle space was occupied by a rough table, one end being fitted with sleeping places like the bunks on board a ship, the other serving as a kitchen. Here Hiram made himself at home as best he could, and soon accommodated himself to his new surroundings.

He had long, long days out in the open air, at first in company with Blundel, later alone, following the primitive occupation of tending sheep. But the hours were scarcely

longer than he had worked in a Lancashire cotton mill, in a close and stifling atmosphere, and amid the incessant buzz of machinery. Here at least the air was pure and exhilarating, and the work not too hard for a healthy and willing man. Even when the summer approached, and the sun began to blaze down upon the land, to shrivel the grass, and to dry up the water in the creeks so that they shrank from running streams into mere stony beds, broken here and there by a standing pool, the peculiar lightness of the atmosphere rendered the heat less oppressive than might be supposed by one who judged of the effect of heat with only the experience of a humid climate like that of England for a guide.

Though on good terms with each of his three companions, Blundel was from the beginning his best friend. Born and brought up amid widely different circumstances, there was still something in the character of the

two which drew them together. Blundel sympathized with Hiram in his desire for self-improvement, and was always ready to afford what help he could, whether in regard to the management of sheep or the cultivation of the mind ; and hence Hiram's knowledge of pastoral pursuits and his mental improvement made satisfactory progress.

Opportunities rose from time to time of acting upon Mr. Hutchinson's advice relative to learning to ride, and these opportunities Hiram was wise enough not to neglect. Before he had been on the station a year he could mount a horse without fear, and keep his seat when mounted.

The busy season of lambing and shearing came and went. Christmas Day and Midsummer Day, both in one, dawned and waned, and May, with its cool nights and its refreshing rains, was nearly gone. Close upon twelve months had flown since Hiram entered upon his new life. Communication

between Boorunga and the nearest post-office was infrequent and uncertain, and Hiram knew that any letters for him would not be sent any nearer than to Adelaide. He had had no word from Millvale, and could not hope to hear, even if letters were waiting for him, until some one made a journey down to the city. About the end of May, however, Mr. Hutchinson returned from a short visit to Adelaide, and brought back with him three letters for his new shepherd.

These letters were sent down to the hut one day while Hiram was out. When he came in at night, quite ready for the supper of tea, mutton, and damper, which he expected the hut-keeper to have ready, they lay upon the table awaiting him. Blundel was already busily engaged with his knife and fork.

“Happy man!” he exclaimed, arresting his fork on its way to his mouth. “You’re

not forgotten yet, anyhow. Here's news from home, and I hope good news."

Hiram's eyes sparkled with pleasure as they fell upon the little heap of precious packages—and how precious they seemed few people who live within the range of a postman's beat, and who have never known a long period of silent separation from their nearest and dearest, will be able to fully realize. The first words that had come to him in this far-away solitude from those who had shared the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of his bygone life—from her who, above all others, was dear to him, for whom he was working week after week, who was never long absent from his waking thoughts, and whose image stood before him in the visions of the night! The first words since he had left his native land to tell him of her continued love and truth, and to express the trust of her gentle, faithful heart that he was prospering well, and that he

would soon be able to take her as his own for evermore ! Precious indeed such words should be—precious as a spring in the desert to the thirsty traveller !

He looked at one letter after the other, recognizing the handwriting of each address. Nothing from Helen ! His countenance fell, but brightened again in a moment. Surely she must have written, and enclosed her missive in one of the others. He opened his mother's first—a short, ill-written scrawl, telling something of her doings since he left, thanking him for the money he had sent, concluding with a bitter, incoherent tirade against some deceiving wench, who had done something base and wrong. Surely this could not be meant to refer to Helen ; and yet his heart sank within him. He hesitated before opening the one which he knew to be from Dawson Schofield. What was the meaning of these kind, commiserating words, and of these exhortations to

bear his trouble like a man and a Christian ? Something dreadful must lie behind it all. Perhaps Mr. Stapleton would be more explicit. Yes, there was the story of Helen's shame and death, told as tenderly as such a story could be told ; but the facts were too fearful to be softened by any tenderness in their recital, and every word seemed to burn his brain, to fall like lead upon his heart.

He had suffered before, but he had never known such suffering as this. He had felt the weight of injustice and borne the brand of shame, but through the most agonizing portion of his life he had had the thought of Helen to help him to bear his burden. In prison, in his voluntary exile, her pure child-like eyes had been to him as stars of hope ; and since his heart had been taken captive by her—and how long since that was he could scarcely tell, but it was long before he had asked her to walk with him up the

hill of life—he had looked forward to union with her as the crowning event of his existence, the chief object for which to labour and to pray.

And now all this was at an end! Not only was she dead—that he could have borne; he would still have had left to him the memory of her as she was, or as she had seemed to him—but she had cast away and trampled upon his true and honourable love, and chosen the path leading to ignominy and destruction. Even the pure image which was enshrined in his heart, and which death alone could not have touched, was shattered utterly, and he must think of her as basely unfaithful or not think of her at all.

In such thoughts as these he forgot where he was and in what company, and groaned aloud.

“Bad news,” muttered the hut-keeper.
“Here, old fellow,” he continued, in the

most sympathetic tone of which he was capable, "go in for some tucker. Grief's bad on an empty stomach;" and he pushed a plate of mutton chops along the table.

Hiram looked at him vacantly, gathered up his papers, and went out.

"There's a woman in this business, I'll guarantee," said the hut-keeper to Blundel. "A man don't look as he looked for nothing."

"He's hard hit, poor chap. I don't like his look," returned the latter, rising.

Hiram walked quickly away, as if to leave the torturing knowledge which he had gained behind; but soon he heard foot-steps following him, and then a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"I don't wish to pry, old man," said Blundel, "but I fear those letters are not what you hoped they'd be."

Hiram laughed aloud, but the laugh was

not good to hear—it was only a cry of pain disguised—and sent a shudder through the man who heard it.

“You’d better go in,” said Hiram, “I’m not in a humour for company just now. Life’s at an end for me, that’s all. Happen it doesn’t matter very much.”

“Nay, nay, it’s not so bad as that. You’re floored now, but you’ll get over it, never fear. Anyhow, I mean to stand by you a bit longer yet.”

“Jest let me alone, I tell you,” cried Hiram, savagely. “What right have you to interfere with me unasked?” and he walked on quickly.

But Blundel still kept up with him until, at length, Hiram turned upon him angrily, and asked him what he meant.

“What do you mean,” retorted Blundel, “by making for the creek?”

“The creek?” said Hiram.

“Yes. Come back to the hut.”

Hiram looked at him in perplexity for a moment, and again broke into a laugh.

"You really didn't think I was such a fool as that," he said. "No, I've not quite reached that height of madness yet."

"Then come back," said Blundel, much relieved. "You must excuse me; but I once had a chum who did drown himself after receiving bad news from home, and I don't want to lose you in the same way."

Hiram turned without a word; but that night his supper remained untasted. The sleepless hours wore slowly away, and in the morning he rose unrefreshed. How sadly different was the aspect which life seemed to present to him now from what it showed before those letters came! In the first strength of his grief he forgot that even his love was not all that made life worth living; as in a thousand, ay, a thousand thousand other instances, he was blinded by his woe, and time was needed for him to recover his

sight so far as to see things once again in their true proportions.

He could not all at once tear out his love. He could not, as he wished, either banish the thought of Helen, or think of her only with contempt. Amid all his bitter thoughts the remembrance of her, as she was, would return, and great gushes of pitying tenderness and of compassion for her fate would come upon him ; emotions which turned to torture, and which he tried to drown by calling to mind the wrong that had been done to him. And during this time, mingling with his resentment towards Helen, was a deep desire for vengeance upon the person who had led her astray, and who, for his own pleasure, had wrecked two lives.

Though Blundel's fear that Hiram would seek to end his troubles by the coward's plan of suicide was utterly groundless, it is true that after receiving his letters he became restless and reckless. His work he attended

to as well as ever ; but he could not settle, when work was done, to the pursuits which, before, had been the source of such great delight. He had a craving for excitement and even for danger, and meditated leaving Boorunga, but whether to go back to England to take vengeance upon Helen's betrayer, or to seek a more adventurous life in order to banish thought, he could not decide. But unlooked-for events occurred which determined the question for him.

CHAPTER XV.

HIRAM HAS A TASTE OF EXCITEMENT WHICH
SATISFIES HIM FOR THE PRESENT.

AMONG the evils with which the squatter who took up land in the thinly settled colony had to contend in the early days, not the least was the hostility of the aborigines. It is true that the danger from this cause was often intensified by the conduct of the white men themselves. Vividly conscious that they belonged to a superior race, with which the native of the soil could not compete in any of the arts of life, they believed themselves endowed with a "right divine" to drive him from his accustomed haunts, forgetting that they might be looked upon

as aggressors and usurpers. In some cases the blacks were treated with a harshness and injustice that not even the exigencies of the squatter's position could excuse. Perhaps the majority set out with the presumption that the blackfellow was essentially bad—an incarnation of dishonesty, cruelty, and treachery, an object of aversion and suspicion, to be avoided as far as possible, but who would construe any leniency or gentleness into a confession of weakness and an invitation to theft or violence. With minds thus preoccupied, it was inevitable that some at least should act in a way calculated to bring down upon them the enmity they had reason to fear, which a more righteous and wiser course might have lessened or averted altogether. Even at the present time stories of wrong so flagrant and cruelty so monstrous on the part of white men towards natives as to bring a blush of shame and indignation to the cheeks of all right-

feeling colonists—and these it is but justice to say form the vast majority—occasionally make their way into the towns from the thinly peopled districts, and set one thinking of the duties, as well as of the rights, of those who believe themselves to be, and in many respects are, the superiors of the races whose lands they have gone in to possess.

The black men who inhabited, or rather haunted, the district of which we write were not by any means saints. It is hardly too much to say that they were among the most degraded of the human species. Ignorant, idle, superstitious, cruel, revengeful, unspeakably obscene—such was the being with whom the early colonists had to deal. And yet, beneath all the ingrained vice of his breeding and training, there was some power to appreciate either justice or kindness ; and those settlers who remembered that though depraved the aboriginal was still a man, and acted accordingly, were not without their

reward. And let it be borne in mind that the blackfellow regarded the whitefellow as an intruder, and his hostility will be accounted for, if not vindicated ; and let it further be borne in mind that up to the time of his coming in contact with the pioneers of civilization he had looked upon all the animals with which he was acquainted as fair game for his spear or club, and it becomes evident that his depredations upon flocks and herds would hardly come within any list of crimes which he had been taught to recognize. If the country were to be utilized it was, no doubt, necessary to teach its barbarian occupants that the white man could not be assailed, nor his property carried off with impunity ; but the severity of the means employed sometimes went far beyond the necessities of the case.

Mr. Elkanah Hutchinson, notwithstanding his eccentricity and his hasty temper, made a point of treating the natives with

kindness ; and he had suffered very little at their hands. A few of his sheep had been carried off occasionally, and the remains found afterwards in such a condition as to prove that the blackfellow had varied his diet by a meal of mutton ; but Mr. Hutchinson had let these things pass lightly, and not taken the trouble to punish the thieves, and had therefore never come into direct collision with the natives. Latterly, a strange tribe had been prowling about and making themselves so objectionable that he had seriously thought of attempting to lay hands on some of them and teach them a salutary lesson. Partly, however, from a distaste to punishing them, and partly from his indifference to the loss of a few sheep, he had taken no action in the matter.

Such was the state of affairs when Hiram received his letters.

About twenty miles to the west of Boorunga was a station called Melunda,

occupied by two brothers, named Gregory. They had been settled on the land between two and three years; and from some reason or other they had been made the objects of special attention on the part of the aborigines. This was generally known at Boorunga; and it was feared that they would be obliged to take up a decided stand against their troublesome visitors.

One morning in June one of the brothers appeared at Boorunga to ask for help. A hut of theirs had been attacked and burnt, and two of its occupants badly assaulted. This outrage had been followed by the driving off of some valuable cattle, which the Gregorys, with help or without, were determined to recover. Such an appeal Mr. Hutchinson could not resist. It was only neighbourly to comply. Besides, if such a gross outrage were allowed to pass in one case, it would be an encouragement to the committal of others. The party of blacks

was not thought to be large, and it was reckoned that if Mr. Hutchinson would furnish three or four determined men they would be sufficient with those whom the Gregorys could muster. He accordingly resolved to go himself, and take with him Blundel, an old shepherd who had seen similar work in New South Wales, and who was located in another hut, and a third man, who was supposed to be an old "lag" (convict) from Van Dieman's Land, but who was both quiet and brave. They were summoned to the head station, and, well armed and mounted, set out in the evening for Melunda in order to be ready to commence a chase early next morning. By the same messenger who summoned them, word was sent to Hiram to attend as far as he could both to his own sheep and to those usually under the care of Blundel.

This was an arduous task; and missing some sheep on the day after Blundel's de-

parture, he went up to the house to borrow a horse. Here he heard, for the first time, the object of the expedition in which Blundel and his employer had joined.

"I'm sadly afraid for master," said Mrs. Cudworth. "He's so reckless that he's sure to get into danger, if there is any to be found. The nasty thieves!"

"I wish they'd let me know," said Hiram.

"You wouldn't wish to go among the treacherous creatures, would you, Mr. Greg?"

"Yes, I would!"

"But they say they carry poisoned spears—they poison them in the putrefying bodies of the dead, and a scratch with one is certain death."

"There are worse things than poisoned spears, Mrs. Cudworth."

"Law, Mr. Greg, how you do talk! and you look so wild, I don't like to look at you. But you men are strange creatures. Some

of you seem to love danger for its own sake. Now, I like to be safe and comfortable, and to do quietly my duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call me."

"I'm tired of this humdrum life. But there, it's no use complaining."

"Not a bit. You'll get used to the loneliness by-and-by. I never heard you complain of it before, and I thought you liked the life."

"When did master say he'd be back?"

"He didn't rightly know. It might be a day or two or it might be a week. Mr. Gregory thought those nasty blackfellows would not have got very far away with the cattle, and that they might overtake them to-day."

"I wish they'd let me know," Hiram repeated. "It would have been a change at least."

"There you are again," exclaimed Mrs. Cudworth. "I cannot understand you men."

"Are they any more difficult to understand than women?" Hiram thought bitterly. He said: "Well, I shall come round to-morrow to ask you if you have heard any tidings from the army. Good afternoon."

"Oh, Mr. Greg, won't you wait a while? We're going to have some heavy rain. Just look at those black clouds banking up the sky."

"There will be a shower, but I shan't melt and can't wait."

And he mounted his horse and rode off.

The clouds gathered thick and fast, and the sky was quickly overspread with a dense curtain. An ominous quiet seemed to prevail, the wind having dropped, and all nature being apparently apprehensive of the coming storm. Vivid gleams of lightning flashed along the horizon, and the thunder beginning to rumble in the distance grew to an almost continuous roar as it approached.

Then a few large drops of rain splashed and pattered upon the leaves and fell in large stars upon the dry soil. Then the windows of heaven were opened and the rain poured down, a thick and blinding stream. The trees were drenched ; the hard, dried ground cracked and hissed ; and the rough furrows which previous storms had ploughed were speedily filled with turbid streams.

Hiram rode on heedless for a time, brooding upon the reflections which Mrs. Cudworth's innocently meant words had awakened. The rapid motion was congenial to his disturbed condition of mind ; and even the storm seemed welcome. But as the lightning grew more vivid, and the thunder broke in sharper and sharper peals until it became nearly like the quick discharge of artillery, his horse began to tremble and then became restive. The rain, too, was now so thick and blinding that he could scarcely see his way. Being near to a

cluster of large gums he dismounted, and, tying his horse to a branch, stood with bended head, his hand resting soothingly on the animal's neck, waiting for the fury of the storm to pass. He had only stood a few minutes when there came a dazzling flash, which momentarily deprived him of sight, making the horse start and quiver in every limb. He heard a crackling and rending, and looking about, saw that a large tree, not fifty yards away, had been rent down to its base, and that it now was but a smoking remnant of its former self.

His first thought, as soon as he could think at all, was one of thankfulness for his escape. Why should not the tree beneath which he stood have been struck instead of the one but a few steps distant? But his natural impulse of gratitude was quickly followed by ideas of a darker hue. What would it have mattered if he had been smitten into a shrivelled heap? The one

thing upon which he had set his heart he could hope for no more ; the one person whom he had loved and trusted above all others had proved false. What would it matter if he were to die ?

In half an hour the thunder and lightning had ceased, and though the rain still fell, it was not nearly so heavy as when he first took shelter beneath the trees. He was soaked to the skin ; but for that he did not care, and he rode off to attend to the business he had in hand.

The rain continued with but slight intermissions for the remainder of the day, and all through the night. Next day, too, the sky was grey with clouds, and much rain fell. According to his promise, Hiram went up to the house to make inquiries concerning the party that had gone to Melunda, but no tidings had yet been received. On the third day of their absence there was still more rain, and nothing had been heard of them.

"Oh, Mr. Greg," said Mrs. Cudworth, on the afternoon of the fourth day, "I begin to feel very uneasy about Mr. Hutchinson and the men. I fear something has happened to them; either they have been hurt or killed by those nasty blackfellows, or they have been caught by the floods in some of the creeks."

"Don't be anxious," replied Hiram. "There would be a large enough party to give a good account of any number of blackfellows they would be likely to meet; and as for the floods, our folks know how to take care of themselves."

Mrs. Cudworth was evidently far from being satisfied; she shook her head dubiously, and sighed.

"If they are not back to-night," she said, "I shall ask you to ride over to Melunda. They will have to come over the plain—suppose you ride to the Knoll. There you can see them if they are within four miles."

“I don’t see that that would be much good. However, I’ll go to please you.”

The Knoll was a little hill not far from the house. From its brow a view was obtainable over the wide tract of country where Hiram had first encountered Mr. Hutchinson, and, in a westerly direction, stretched away to the hills among which Melunda lay.

Yes, there they were! Four mounted men making for Boorunga. That must be the party for which he was looking. But how were they to cross the creek? The little brook which he had crossed dryshod on his first arrival by the aid of a couple of stepping-stones, was now a swollen, discoloured stream, rushing and boiling on between its banks, and yet the men were heading straight for the ford, as if anticipating no difficulty or danger. After watching them for a few minutes, Hiram rode to the bank of the creek, and saw at once that

a passage could only be attempted at imminent risk. There was nothing to be done, however, but to wait.

Mr. Hutchinson and his companions were not long in reaching the bank. They saw Hiram while still at a distance, and hailed him with the native cry of "cooe." When they came within sight of the water they paused, and it was evident that a consultation took place as to the practicability of crossing. Mr. Hutchinson apparently took one side, and the other three men the opposite one. At length he broke from the little group, and rode carefully down what remained uncovered of the sloping path, then putting spurs to his horse, and freely using his whip, in a second he was in the yellow flood.

"Hi ! hi ! hi !" they heard him shout.

The horse made gallant efforts, but the stream was too much for its strength. It struggled for but a few moments, with its

head thrown back and its eyeballs glaring, then yielded to the pressure of the current and was swept away. Another moment and horse and rider were seen separate, tossing almost helpless in the water.

Quick as thought Hiram galloped away down the stream until he had gained upon the drowning man, and reached a somewhat shallower part of the bed. An instant's hesitation and he would be too late! One cut upon his horse's flank, a leap, a splash, and he had grasped the clothing of Mr. Hutchinson. Fortunately his horse had its head against the stream, and, almost before Hiram had clutched his object, the animal turned, and with a tremendous effort regained the bank.

A cheer from the party on the other side reached him as he half dragged, half carried the insensible body of his employer out of the water. He let him sink upon the ground, and dismounted to ascertain the

extent of his injuries and to render what help was possible. As Mr. Hutchinson remained unconscious for some minutes, and was to all appearance dead, Hiram left him to procure help.

Great consternation prevailed at the station when Hiram, wet and mud-stained, dashed up to the door. Assuming a tone of command, he ordered brandy, and directed a conveyance to be got ready and sent down with as great despatch as possible. Returning, he poured some spirit into the mouth of the unconscious man, and eagerly chafed his hands. Before the wagon arrived, his endeavours were rewarded by a sigh; then the eyes opened, and Mr. Hutchinson made an attempt to speak, but fell back on Hiram's arm overpowered.

The half-drowned proprietor of Boorunga was taken home, and there confided to the care of Mrs. Cudworth; and Hiram, after remaining long enough to be assured that

no danger was to be apprehended, and that he could be of no further service, returned to the hut.

“I was wishing for excitement and adventure,” he thought, as he walked along, “and I have had a taste of both. Only the other day, too, I was saying that I did not care for life—that my life now is of no use. It has been of some little good to-day at least.” Here he paused in his walk, and stood still, as if arrested by a new idea. “Hiram Greg,” he said, apostrophizing himself, “you have been selfish, and because you have been selfish you have been both weak and foolish. True, you have been deceived; true, you have had one of your dearest hopes crushed; true, your faith in your kind has received a rude shock. But you have been a fool to let even these things make you think that all was lost. Why,” he continued, still thinking aloud, “there is my mother. I can at least make her old

age more tolerable ; and though *she* is no more, even for memory, there are still faithful hearts caring for me, and maybe there is still a work to be done in the world by me. O God, help me to drive away hard thoughts ; help me to live more as a brave, true man should ! ”

So Hiram came to himself once more, and went to sleep that night in a better and healthier mood than he had known since his greatest trouble came.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. HUTCHINSON ACKNOWLEDGES A DEBT.

"I NEVER expected to see you come out alive, I must say," remarked Blundel next evening as they sat smoking their pipes.

"But you see I did," returned Hiram, with a smile.

"Wasn't born to be drowned," muttered the hut-keeper, who was in an ill-temper.

"Well, it was one of the maddest tricks I ever witnessed," said Blundel. "I shouldn't have thought you could have done it."

"Neither should I," replied Hiram, "and I couldn't have done it if I'd stopped to think about it. But what made the old man attempt to cross?"

“Why, it was a case of either crossing, camping out without either shelter or tucker, or going back a good twenty miles to Melunda to beg for quarters for the night. And you know what a headstrong fellow Hutchinson is. He cannot bear to be thwarted; and he would make the attempt though we all tried to dissuade him. He was near paying a heavy price for his obstinacy, though.”

Blundel knocked the ashes out of his pipe and carefully refilled it.

“How did you get home? You did not attempt what you had seen him fail to do?”

“Hardly. We rode a full ten miles up the stream, and had nearly come to the conclusion that we should be obliged to make a night of it in the open air, when we found the last spot we had resolved to try feasible enough, and we got across without any difficulty. We reached the station late and

remained there. Mrs. Cudworth, good old soul, was in a state of great anxiety about us, and cried for joy when we walked in. Hutchinson was then quite comfortable and fast asleep; and Mrs. Cudworth cried again when we told her how you had rescued him."

"You didn't tell her that, did you?" said Hiram.

"Of course we did, man! And she said you almost frightened her out of her wits with the figure you cut and your excited talk; but she forgives you, never fear, and says you're a brave lad, and she would be proud of such a son. And well she might," added Blundel, clapping Hiram on the shoulder; "many a man has received a medal for less."

"Did you recover the cattle?" inquired Hiram, by way of changing the subject.

"Yes."

Blundel had all at once become taciturn;

and his companion looked at him with a curious glance.

“ Had you much trouble ? ”

“ Not much.”

“ Did the blackfellows show fight ? ”

“ One or two of them did.”

“ Anybody hurt ? ”

“ None of our party.”

“ Some of the blackfellows, then ? ”

“ One of them.”

“ Seriously ? ”

“ He didn’t suffer much. He won’t steal any more cattle.”

“ Killed ? ”

“ Shot through the head.”

“ I’ve never been in at anything of the sort, and should like to hear more particulars. How did you find them out ? ” Hiram asked this question a trifle impatiently, being unable to account for the curtness of manner, which was very different from his companion’s usual behaviour.

“It’s not a very entertaining story ; but if you will have it this is it. There were twelve of us altogether with a friendly black for guide. We left Melunda in good time in the morning, and followed up the traces until night. Then we camped. Next day we moved more cautiously until nearly noon. The traces were fresh and clearly visible to our eyes, which had not always been the case, though the nigger saw them well enough. Creeping on as quietly as we could, we came upon the whole black gang—about twenty in number—cooking and eating one of Gregory’s beasts, and ten or twelve bullocks grazing in the valley within sight. They perceived our approach, and, leaving their meal, seized their spears and clubs. The younger Gregory raised his gun, fired, smashed the small branch of a tree near which the chief was standing, and this brought them to their senses. They saw that we were too strong for them, and we

drew near. Of course, they agreed to give up the cattle, and, after some difficulty, the chief surrendered, and was led off to the station by Gregory. What he'll do with the ugly thief—whether send him to a magistrate or let him go in a few days—I don't know. But I'm tired, and shall go to bed."

With this not very satisfactory conclusion Blundel cut short the conversation, and was soon asleep.

Mr. Hutchinson's recovery was rapid, and he was about again before a week had elapsed from the time of his accident. No sooner was he able to bear the fatigue of a long conversation than he sent for Hiram and Blundel.

"Come, here, man. Why don't you shake hands?" he cried, as soon as the former entered his room.

Hiram went up to him, and held out his hand. Hutchinson grasped it, but appeared to find some difficulty in speaking.

"I know all about it, lad," he said at length. "I told you once that you were one of the foolhardy people who risk their lives for others, and you pretended not to know what I was driving at. Do you remember? Why don't you speak?"

"There's no need for me to speak if you know all about it."

"I'm in a nice position. But sit down. Why do you stand staring there? I'm in a nice position, Mrs. Cudworth. Here are two men who have both saved my life, one from an assassin's spear, the other from the water."

Hiram looked at Blundel, and Blundel looked out of the window. Here, then, was the reason why he would not go into further particulars of the encounter with the blacks. Hiram sympathized with the feeling which prompted such reticence.

"Yes, Mrs. Cudworth," continued Mr. Hutchinson, "when we thought we had

settled affairs satisfactorily with those black devils—excuse the strong language, ma'am, but sometimes one must find relief in that way—and I was going off towards the cattle, one of them—I mean one of the black devils, and not one of the cattle—sprang up from behind a bush, and was just about to hurl a spear, when—crack! and he jumped three feet into the air, and plumped down never to rise again. He had a bullet in his heart, ma'am, put there by Gentleman Blundel. I didn't see him until I heard the pistol-shot, and if it had missed I should not have seen anything else. That is rescue number one. I come home and very naturally object to be turned back when within a stone's throw, as one may say, of my own door, and venture, perhaps, a little precipitately—decidedly precipitately, I may say—into the creek which I have crossed hundreds of times before. The result you know, Mrs. Cudworth, for I believe I heard the par-

ticulars of rescue number two from your own lips. Now, ma'am, isn't mine a very awkward position? Why don't you answer me?"

"It might have been awkwarder, sir," said the lady to whom this appeal was made.

"Bah! I'm in this position, Mrs. Cudworth, that I owe a debt of gratitude—two debts of gratitude—which I don't know how to adequately discharge. No, no; neither of you need make any protestations! I am not talking to you, but to Mrs. Cudworth, and you might have the manners to let me finish without interruption. What can I do under such circumstances? If I cannot pay my debts in full, it is clear I must compound with my creditors. As for you, gentlemen, I beg to thank you both for the services you have rendered me, and to give you notice that your engagements will terminate at the end of next month. Mrs. Cudworth, show them out."

“What’s the meaning of this?” asked Hiram, much perplexed, as soon as they were out of earshot. “It’s very queer behaviour, to say the least of it that can be said.”

Blundel’s face wore an amused expression, as he replied quietly—

“It is queer certainly. But there is no need to be alarmed. You haven’t known Hutchinson as long as I have or you’d understand him better.”

“His meaning seemed plain enough, and not at all difficult to comprehend.”

“That’s just the point. When you think you understand the old man best you are often furthest astray. Usually more is meant than meets the ear in what he says.”

“I hope it may be so now for his own credit’s sake. I don’t care much about leaving the run if he wishes it. There are plenty of places where one might do as well, I suppose. But one doesn’t like to receive

shabby treatment from a man one had begun to respect. It gives one a disagreeable shock."

"Come, Greg, you are not doing Hutchinson justice! I suspect that he was feeling rather overcome by the thought of what you had done for him, and was afraid of breaking down. There are people who cannot bear to show anything like soft-heartedness. They are ashamed to let their best feelings appear on the surface, and rather than do this they would prefer that people should consider them unfeeling brutes."

"Well," said Hiram, still somewhat mystified, "we are in an awkward position anyhow."

"Not a bit of it. Hutchinson generally finds his way to the right goal at last, however many crooked turns and odd dashes he makes in reaching it. Isn't it so, Mrs. Cudworth?" he asked, as that lady joined them.

“Isn’t what, how?” asked Mrs. Cudworth, not having caught the remark.

“Isn’t it true that the master generally comes right in the end ? He’s not the man to do a shabby action.”

“He is not indeed ; and any one who says he is ought to be ashamed of himself. He’s got some scheme in his head about you two ; and he’ll work it out in his own way. Law ! I could tell you something that would open your eyes.” And Mrs. Cudworth pursed up her lips with the air of one who is in possession of a profound secret.

Blundel smiled and nodded to Hiram, as much as to say, “I told you so.”

“And it is a secret ?” he asked.

“Yes, a very important one.”

“Concerning us ?”

“Now, Mr. Blundel,” replied the lady, laughing, “if you want to pump you might take a little exercise out in the yard.”

"But you see we're in a very anxious state of mind," Blundel retorted, banteringlly.

"Then you're a couple of noodles—there. You must just wait and be patient."

"But you might tell us if the secret concerns us."

"Well, yes. Now be content."

"But how long shall we have to wait before this mystery is explained?"

"Until Mr. Hutchinson returns from town."

"Going to Adelaide again, so soon, is he?" cried Blundel, catching at the clue thus discovered.

"Of course he is! And now I shall not say another word on the subject; and you had better go away and attend to your business, and leave me to attend to mine."

Shortly afterwards Mr. Hutchinson left Boorunga for Adelaide, and was away from home for nearly a fortnight. When he returned he brought back with him two fresh

hands, who, as he told Mrs. Cudworth, were to take the places of Greg and Gentleman Blundel. Leaving them at the station, he rode down to the Beacon hut in the evening, about the time that the shepherds usually came in for the night. No one was in, however, when he arrived, excepting the hut-keeper.

The interior of the primitive dwelling was in much the same condition as when Hiram took up his quarters there a year before. The only change of importance was the addition, near the bunks, of a small set of shelves containing books. Some of these were the property of Blundel, and the rest belonged to Hiram; the shelves themselves being the product of one of Hiram's first attempts at amateur carpentry. Mr. Hutchinson was looking curiously at the books, taking them down one after another, and carefully replacing each one when he had examined it, when Blundel entered.

“Good evening, Mr. Hutchinson,” he said, betraying no surprise.

“Good evening,” returned Mr. Hutchinson, looking sharply round, and then proceeding with his examination of the books without further remark.

“I trust you had a pleasant journey, and found all your friends well in Adelaide?”

“The journey was very pleasant, and my friends were all quite well.”

Blundel made no further attempt at conversation, and Mr. Hutchinson still occupied himself with the volumes, as if the one object of his visit were to make himself thoroughly acquainted with their contents. At length Hiram opened the door and glanced round curiously, warned by the horse tied up outside that a visitor was within.

“I say,” exclaimed Mr. Hutchinson, addressing the hut-keeper, as soon as he saw Hiram, “you can leave that supper for a quarter of an hour, and if you see the other

fellow coming this way tell him I want a few minutes' talk with Blundel and Greg, and he can keep you company outside until I go away."

The man took the hint and retired. Taking a seat at the rough table, and pushing the lamp to one side, so that he could see the faces of the two men, to each of whom he was so deeply indebted, he began abruptly.

"There are almost as many sheep on the run as it will carry comfortably, eh, Blundel?"

"I should say so, sir, though I don't know the exact numbers."

"But I do; and it is my opinion that it would be overstocked soon if some were not disposed of. I had sufficient capital to begin with, and I have had no serious losses."

"It would be easy enough to sell any you don't want," suggested Blundel.

“Do you know what I have been to Adelaide for, eh?” asked Mr. Hutchinson, sharply. “Why don’t you speak?”

“Perhaps to sell some sheep,” returned Hiram.

“No, I have not! I’ve been to engage some hands to take your places. What do you think of that?”

“That it naturally follows upon your giving us notice to leave your service,” said Hiram.

“Exactly,” retorted Hutchinson. “You’ve hit the nail on the head, and I admire your penetration. You see, I consider both of you too good for the position you have been occupying. Here’s Blundel, a man of breeding and education; and here’s Greg, a plucky and trustworthy fellow not without abilities, possibly not without ambition; and both of you might be doing something better than shepherding another man’s sheep. In short, I’ve made up my mind that you

shall turn squatters. Five hundred sheep will make a good beginning, and you can start out and open up some suitable country as soon as you like. I'll find the sheep, and I suppose you have each saved a bit of money that will be sufficient for anything else you may require. You don't object to a partnership, eh? Anyhow, talk the matter over, and let me know. Good night."

Mr. Hutchinson had spoken so rapidly that there was no chance for either to reply; and as soon as he had finished, he left the hut. Hiram and Blundel sat looking at each other almost breathless, and before a word was uttered, Mr. Hutchinson again appeared at the door.

"As to those sheep," he said, "I don't mean to give them to you out and out. You'll be able to pay for them easily in two or three years if all goes well. The new shepherds will be down here to-morrow, and as there won't be room for you all in the

hut, you had better come to Boorunga until you're ready to start for up-country."

"I told you the old man would come right," said Blundel, triumphantly, as soon as the sound of Mr. Hutchinson's horse's feet was lost in the distance.

"And he has come right with a vengeance," returned Hiram.

"Now for some supper; and then Greg, my boy, we'll go out and have a pipe, while we collect our scattered senses and talk over this change of fortune."

The other two occupants of the hut, having seen Mr. Hutchinson depart, came in, and the mutton-chops and tea were quickly prepared. The meal passed in comparative silence, Hiram and Blundel being too much occupied with their own reflections to talk; their companions, not at any time greatly given to loquacity, being restrained by their evident preoccupation and reserve.

The night was calm and still, and the

intensely blue sky was thickly studded with stars. The two young men paced slowly to and fro not far from the hut, and, for a time, neither spoke. Blundel was thinking that the day was, perhaps, nearer than he had anticipated when he would be able to return without shame to the home which his youthful follies had caused him to quit. Hiram was contrasting the actual present with what might have been. He was not, and did not pretend, even to himself, to be careless about the prospect that was opening out before him. Whatever he might have been immediately after the receipt of his letters, he was not indifferent now. But how much brighter would have been his hope, how much more complete his satisfaction, if he could still have looked forward to sharing his good fortune with Helen? He imagined the expression of joy and pride which he had dreamt of seeing on her face when she should hear that he had hewn his

way to an easier path, and that he had reached a gentler and a less jagged slope by which he could conduct her up the hill of life. What gladness it would have been to him to take her to a home—such a home as did not now seem such a distant vision—where she would have known none of the hard struggles and anxieties of her former life, and wherein his love would have made light and radiant every hour of the day ! But she had chosen differently. She had listened to a tempting voice which had lured her into the deep abyss. Poor Helen ! She must have been very unhappy before it had come to that. Perhaps he would learn to pity her, and to pity her only, in the course of years. He had reached this point in his reflections when Blundel's voice recalled him to their joint concerns.

“ Well, Greg, my boy, what about this partnership ? Is it a bargain ? ”

“ If you are willing—yes. I am afraid,

though, the bargain is not a very equal one ?”

“How so ?”

“You have had so much more experience than I have, and in almost all practical affairs I should have to depend upon you for instruction and advice.”

“Set off against that that you have done more to earn the chance which we are to share together. I only shot a nigger, without any risk to myself; you put your own life in peril in that boiling stream.”

“To say nothing of your years of faithful service before I came about the place,” put in Hiram.

“And nothing of your energy and readiness for work,” returned Blundel, imitating Hiram’s tone.

“Well, if you are satisfied with your chum I am satisfied with mine, and so we’ll say no more on that head.”

“It’s a bargain, then, and through thick and thin we stick together.”

And the two shook hands.

A journey into the wilderness, such as they were looking forward to, was not to be undertaken lightly ; and far into the night they discussed the details of their scheme. Probably for months they would be far away from the haunts of men ; and it would be necessary to start out with as good a stock of needful provisions and other equipments as their means would allow. Moving gently forward, until they reached the unoccupied country, they would, as soon as possible, select a suitable locality. After securing a legal right to settle upon the land they selected they would have to build a dwelling ; and then they might consider themselves as fairly established on their own responsibility. They would certainly require some help at the outset, and still more as time went on and their undertaking grew. These and other topics came under discussion, but leaving many points still undeter-

mined, they at length turned in for their last night's rest in the Beacon hut.

As Mr. Hutchinson had intimated, the two new shepherds came next morning to commence their duties ; and Hiram and Blundel took up their quarters as guests at the head station. Here several days were spent in deep consultation with Mr. Hutchinson, and in laying down such plans as his and Blundel's experience suggested. Going beyond his first promise, Mr. Hutchinson declared his intention of furnishing them with horses and a waggon, and hinted that if they were short of money for other necessities he would supply the deficiency.

There was still an abundance of time at their disposal before the season came for their setting out. During the lambing time they made themselves useful upon the run ; and in the interval between lambing and shearing they made a journey down to Adelaide to effect needful purchases.

Here Hiram renewed his acquaintance with Mr. William Hutchinson, and introduced his friend ; Mr. William, however, had heard of the services which both had rendered to his brother. In Hiram's case, his welcome would have been cordial without such an additional recommendation ; now, in regard to both, it was warm and hearty in extreme. In business matters, he told Hiram, he was doing well ; and he and his wife were happy in the land of their adoption. Even Miss Braceley thought she might learn to tolerate the place in time.

Before leaving Adelaide they engaged two men to accompany them in their adventure, and returned to Boorunga for the shearing.

At length the morning of their departure came, and the little party left the well-known place to find and subdue a region yet unknown. And as Blundel and Hiram passed out of sight Mrs. Cudworth wiped away the tears from her eyes, and hoped they wouldn't

be molested by those nasty blackfellows with their poisoned spears ; and Mr. Hutchinson, forgetting Mrs. Cudworth's vicinity, uttered a hearty "God-speed !" of which next moment he appeared to be ashamed.

END OF VOL. II.





